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THE ORIGIN OF MR GONE

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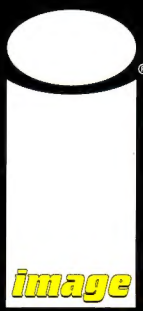
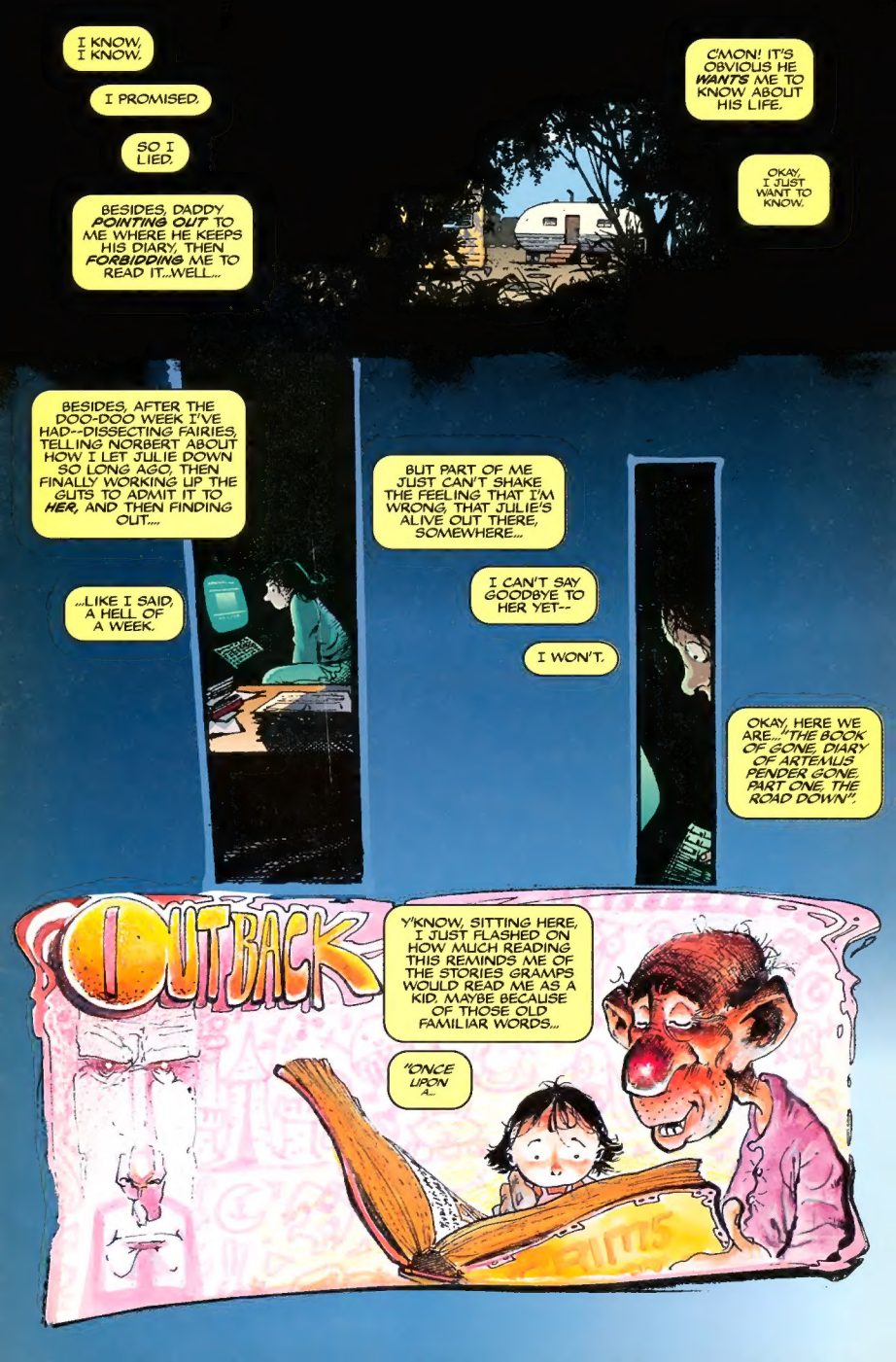
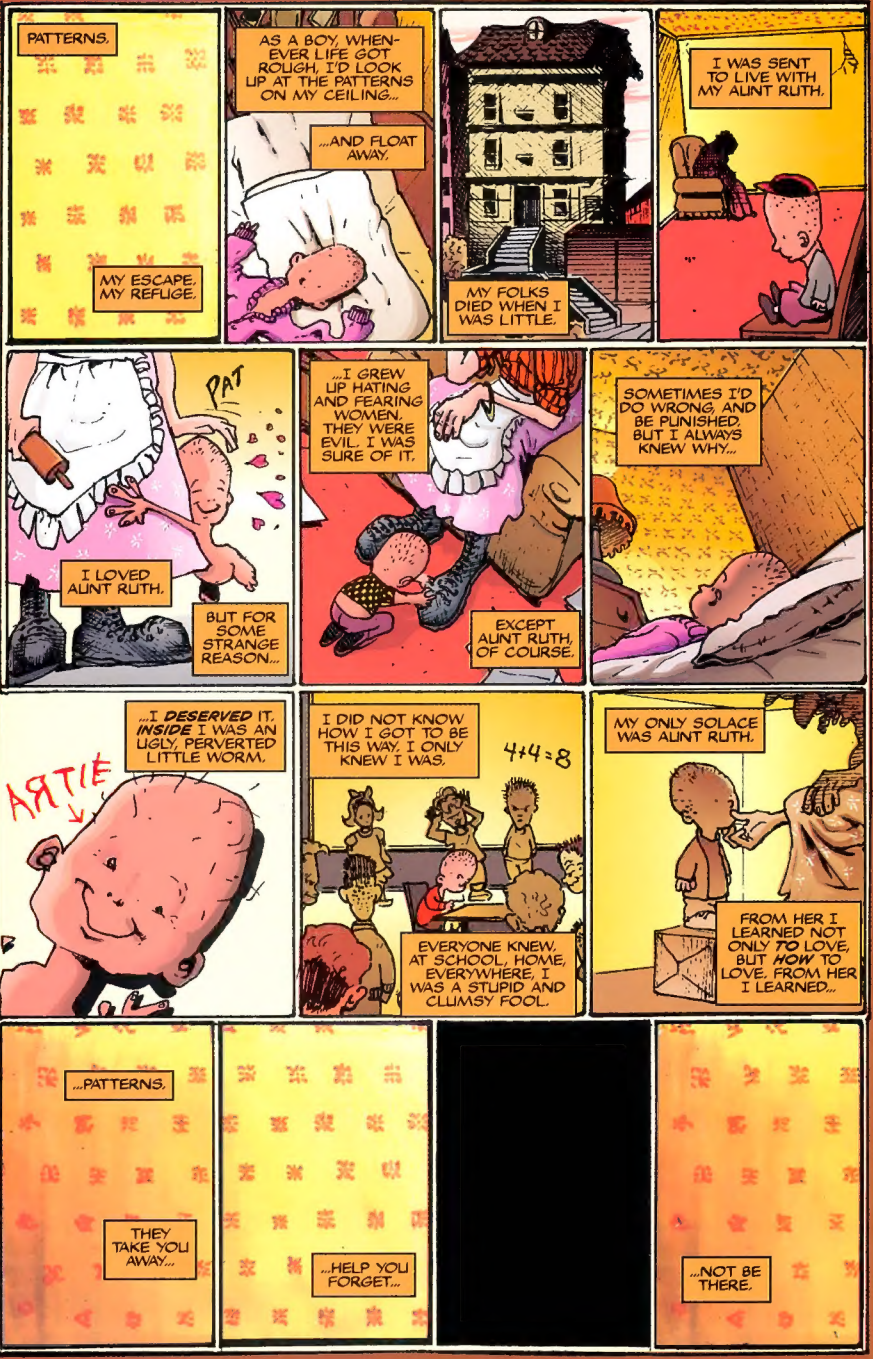
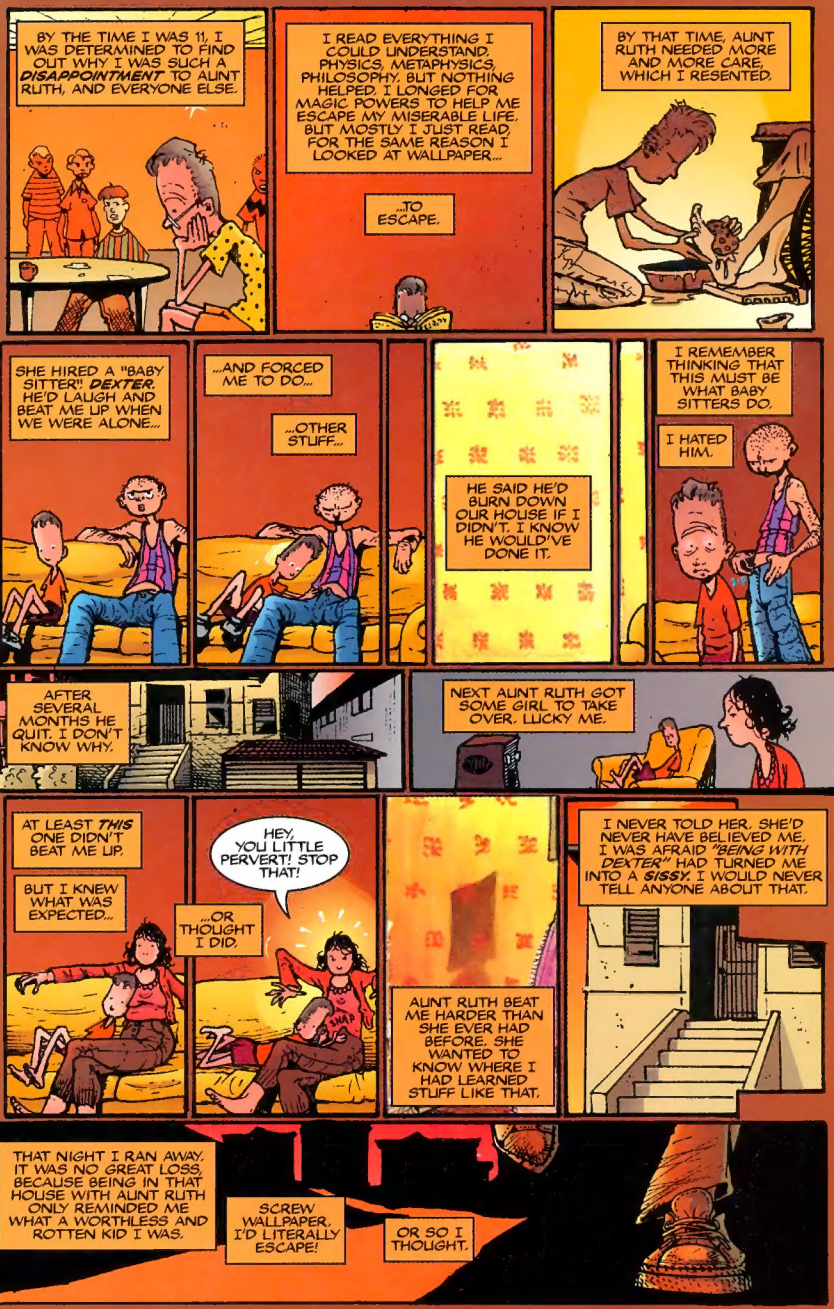
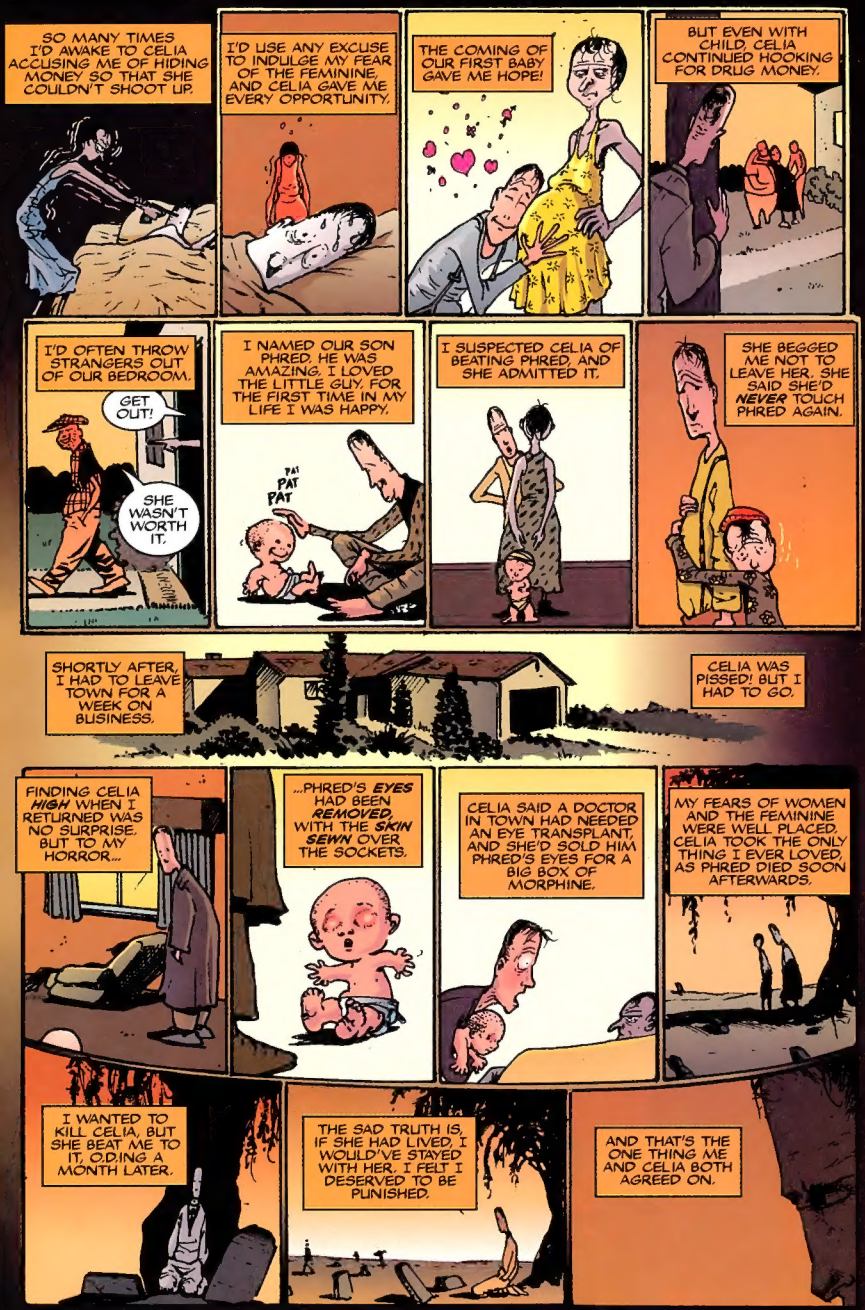


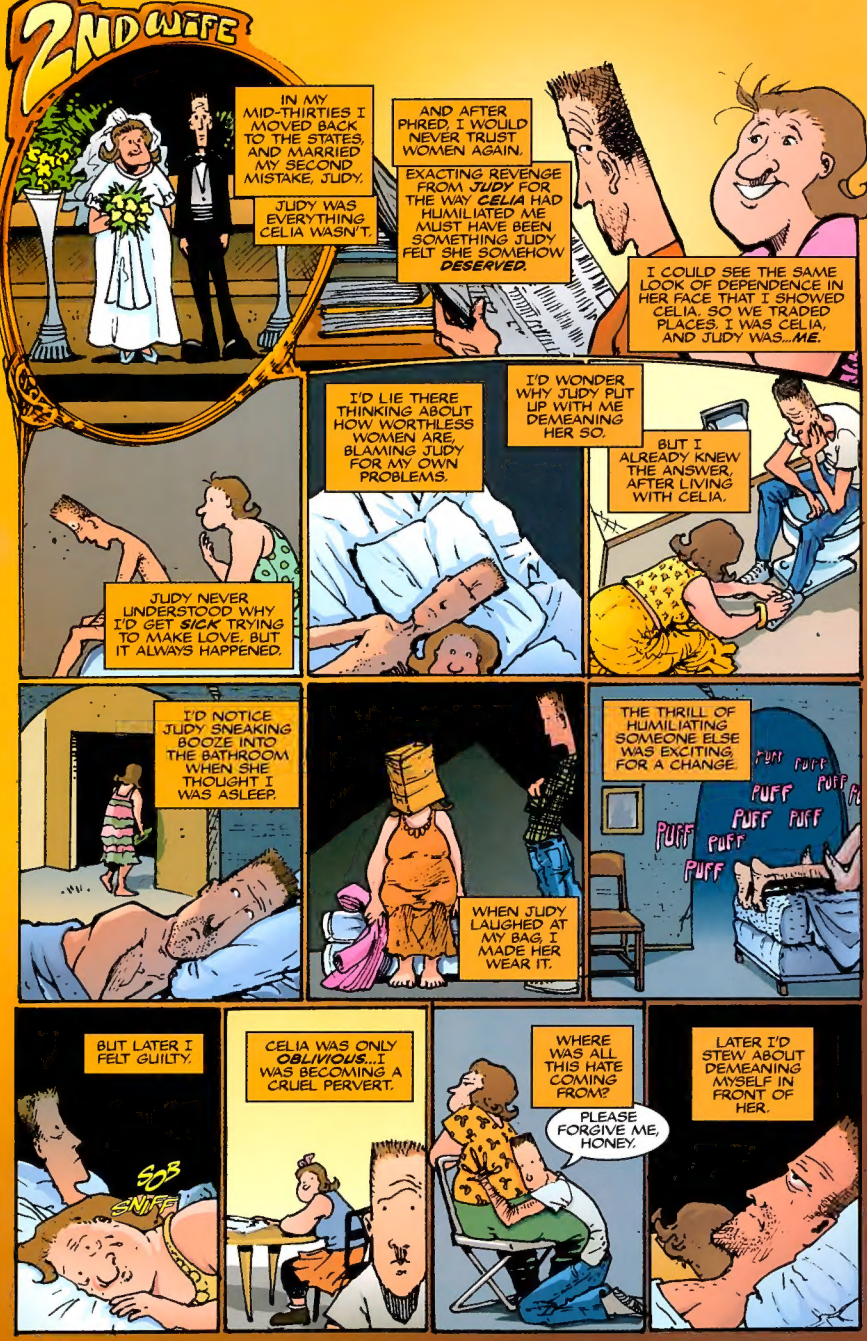

I KNOW, I KNOW.
I PROMISED.
SO I LIED.
BESIDES, DADDY *POINTING OUT* TO ME WHERE HE KEEPS HIS DIARY, THEN *FORBIDDING* ME TO READ IT...WELL...
C'MON! IT'S OBVIOUS HE *WANTS* ME TO KNOW ABOUT HIS LIFE.
OKAY, I JUST WANT TO KNOW.
BESIDES, AFTER THE DOO-DOO WEEK I'VE HAD--DISSECTING FAIRIES, TELLING NORBERT ABOUT HOW I LET JULIE DOWN SO LONG AGO, THEN FINALLY WORKING UP THE GUTS TO ADMIT IT TO *HER*, AND THEN FINDING OUT....
...LIKE I SAID, A HELL OF A WEEK.
BUT PART OF ME JUST CAN'T SHAKE THE FEELING THAT I'M WRONG, THAT JULIE'S ALIVE OUT THERE, SOMEWHERE...
I CAN'T SAY GOODBYE TO HER YET--
I WON'T.
OKAY, HERE WE ARE... "*THE BOOK OF GONE, DIARY OF ARTEMUS PENDER GONE, PART ONE, THE ROAD DOWN*".
OUTBACK
Y'KNOW, SITTING HERE, I JUST FLASHED ON HOW MUCH READING THIS REMINDS ME OF THE STORIES GRAMPS WOULD READ ME AS A KID. MAYBE BECAUSE OF THOSE OLD FAMILIAR WORDS...
"ONCE UPON A...

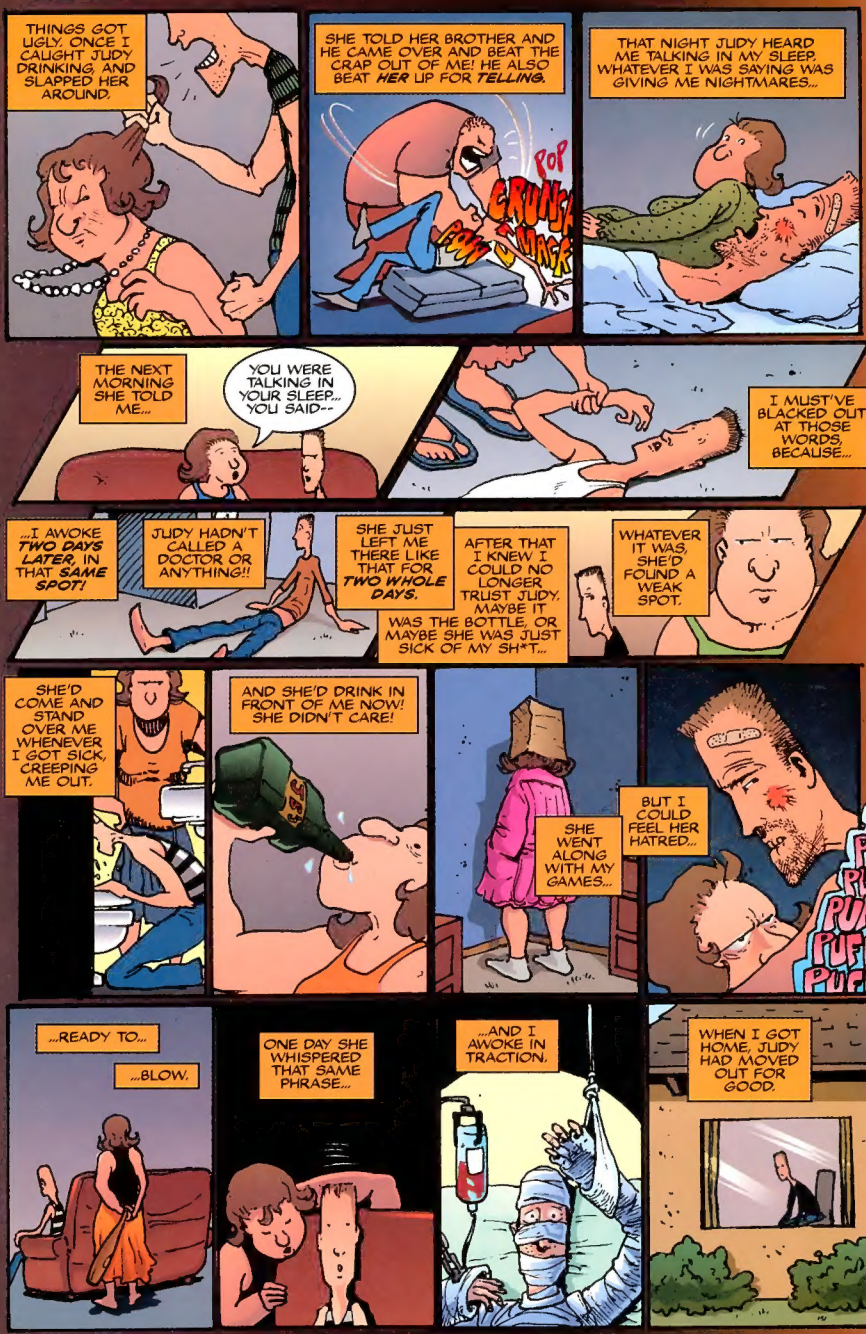

PATTERNS.
MY ESCAPE, MY REFUGE.
AS A BOY, WHENEVER LIFE GOT ROUGH, I'D LOOK UP AT THE PATTERNS ON MY CEILING...
...AND FLOAT AWAY.
MY FOLKS DIED WHEN I WAS LITTLE.
I WAS SENT TO LIVE WITH MY AUNT RUTH.
PAT
I LOVED AUNT RUTH.
BUT FOR SOME STRANGE REASON...
...I GREW UP HATING AND FEARING WOMEN. THEY WERE EVIL. I WAS SURE OF IT.
EXCEPT AUNT RUTH, OF COURSE.
SOMETIMES I'D DO WRONG, AND BE PUNISHED, BUT I ALWAYS KNEW WHY...
ARTIE
...I DESERVED IT. INSIDE I WAS AN UGLY, PERVERTED LITTLE WORM.
I DID NOT KNOW HOW I GOT TO BE THIS WAY, I ONLY KNEW I WAS.
4+4=8
EVERYONE KNEW. AT SCHOOL, HOME, EVERYWHERE, I WAS A STUPID AND CLUMSY FOOL.
MY ONLY SOLACE WAS AUNT RUTH.
FROM HER I LEARNED NOT ONLY TO LOVE, BUT HOW TO LOVE. FROM HER I LEARNED...
...PATTERNS.
THEY TAKE YOU AWAY...
...HELP YOU FORGET...
...NOT BE THERE.

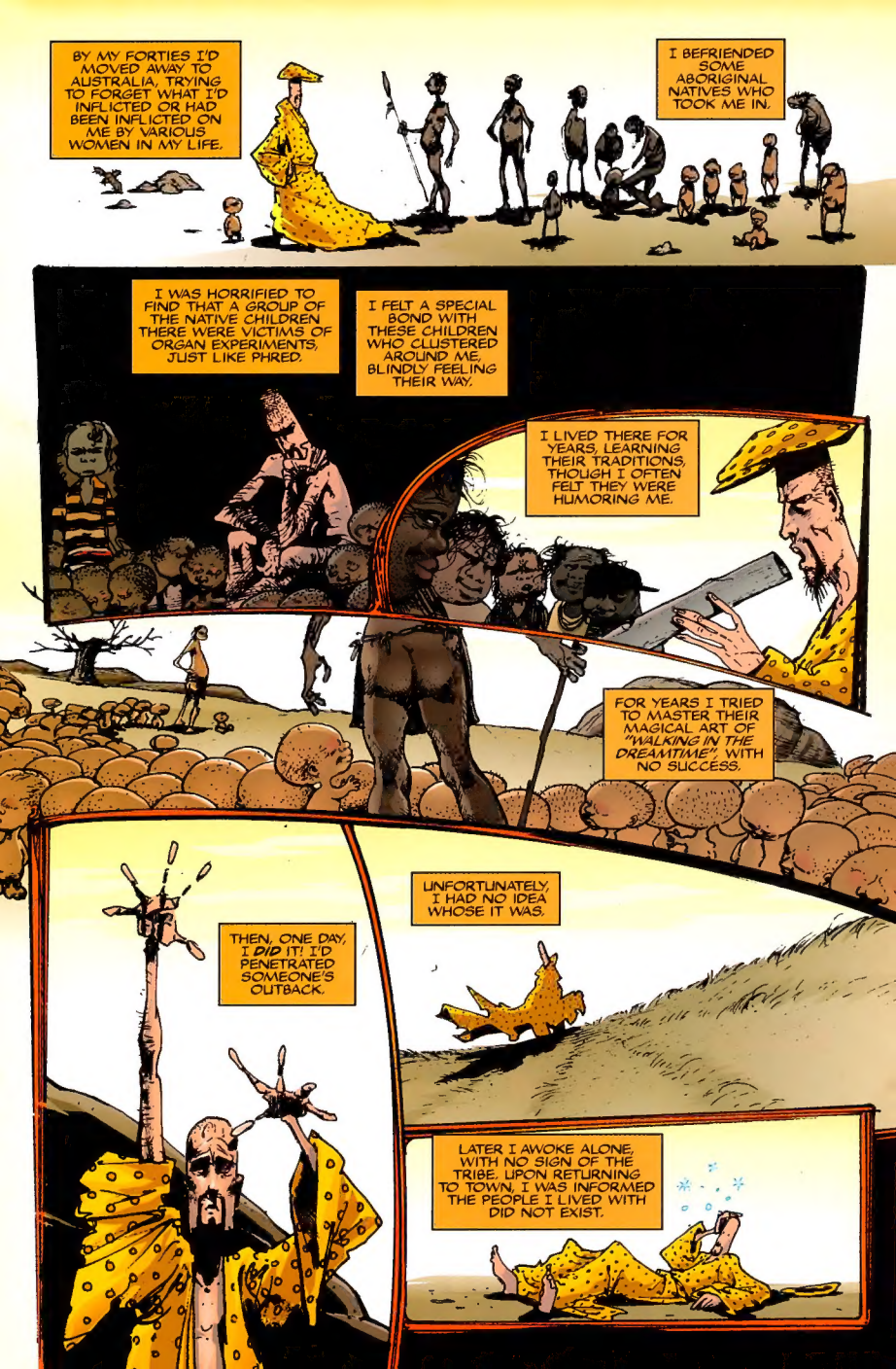

BY THE TIME I WAS 11, I WAS DETERMINED TO FIND OUT WHY I WAS SUCH A *DISAPPOINTMENT* TO AUNT RUTH, AND EVERYONE ELSE.
I READ EVERYTHING I COULD UNDERSTAND. PHYSICS, METAPHYSICS, PHILOSOPHY. BUT NOTHING HELPED. I LONGED FOR MAGIC POWERS TO HELP ME ESCAPE MY MISERABLE LIFE. BUT MOSTLY I JUST READ, FOR THE SAME REASON I LOOKED AT WALLPAPER...
...TO ESCAPE.
BY THAT TIME, AUNT RUTH NEEDED MORE AND MORE CARE, WHICH I RESENTED.
SHE HIRED A "BABY SITTER" *DEXTER*. HE'D LAUGH AND BEAT ME UP WHEN WE WERE ALONE...
...AND FORCED ME TO DO...
...OTHER STUFF...
HE SAID HE'D BURN DOWN OUR HOUSE IF I DIDN'T. I KNOW HE WOULD'VE DONE IT.
I REMEMBER THINKING THAT THIS MUST BE WHAT BABY SITTERS DO.
I HATED HIM.
AFTER SEVERAL MONTHS HE QUIT. I DON'T KNOW WHY.
NEXT AUNT RUTH GOT SOME GIRL TO TAKE OVER. LUCKY ME.
AT LEAST *THIS* ONE DIDN'T BEAT ME UP.
BUT I KNEW WHAT WAS EXPECTED...
...OR THOUGHT I DID.
HEY, YOU LITTLE PERVERT! STOP THAT!
SNAP
AUNT RUTH BEAT ME HARDER THAN SHE EVER HAD BEFORE. SHE WANTED TO KNOW WHERE I HAD LEARNED STUFF LIKE THAT.
I NEVER TOLD HER. SHE'D NEVER HAVE BELIEVED ME. I WAS AFRAID *"BEING WITH DEXTER"* HAD TURNED ME INTO A *SISSY*. I WOULD NEVER TELL ANYONE ABOUT THAT.
THAT NIGHT I RAN AWAY. IT WAS NO GREAT LOSS, BECAUSE BEING IN THAT HOUSE WITH AUNT RUTH ONLY REMINDED ME WHAT A WORTHLESS AND ROTTEN KID I WAS.
SCREW WALLPAPER. I'D LITERALLY ESCAPE!
OR SO I THOUGHT.

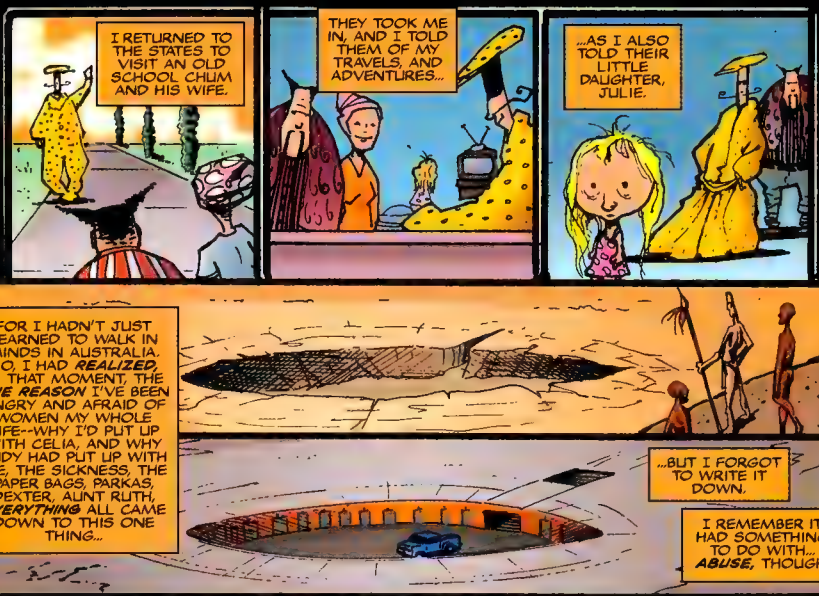
1ST WIFE
IN MY TWENTIES I MOVED TO BORA BORA, WHERE I MET MY FIRST MISTAKE, CELIA. SHE SWORE THAT IF I MARRIED HER, SHE'D GIVE UP HOOKING AND HEROIN --WHICH SHE INSTANTLY RENEGED ON, WHICH IS WHY I MARRIED HER, OF COURSE.
IT WAS ABOUT THIS TIME THAT I SET OUT TO LEARN WHY WOMEN SCARED AND ANGERED ME SO. IT WAS PUZZLING, ASIDE FROM THE OCCASIONAL PUNISHMENT, MY AUNT HAD SHOWN ME NOTHING BUT LOVE.
I DIDN'T GET IT. WHERE DID IT COME FROM, THIS FEAR OF THE FEMININE? AND WHY WERE CELIA'S WORST QUALITIES THOSE THAT KEPT ME WITH HER?
META PHYSICS
I OFTEN CAME HOME...
...TO FIND HER STRUNG OUT. WHEN SHE AWOKE...
...I'D BE BLAMED.
SHE'D YELL AND SCREAM, THEN APOLOGIZE AFTERWARDS.
THEN I'D FEEL SECRETLY SUPERIOR.
AND THEN, EVENTUALLY, I'D FEEL SORRY FOR HER...
...AND THEN I'D "HELP" HER.
A JUNKIE'S RARELY IN THE MOOD, AND I GOT PHYSICALLY ILL AT THE THOUGHT OF NORMAL RELATIONS. I DON'T KNOW WHY.
I'D DEVELOPED A FETISH OF WEARING A PARKA AND BAG OVER MY HEAD. I SHARED IT WITH CELIA ONCE...
WHAT'RE YOU, JOKING?! WHAT AN IDIOT YOU LOOK LIKE! TAKE IT OFF!
AFTER THAT WE DID IT "NORMALLY" BUT I WASN'T THERE.
I FELT NAUSEA.

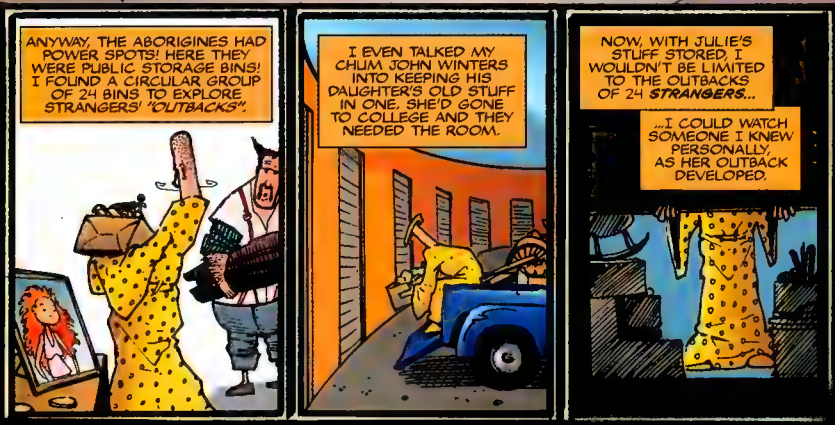

SO MANY TIMES I'D AWAKE TO CELIA ACCUSING ME OF HIDING MONEY SO THAT SHE COULDN'T SHOOT UP.
I'D USE ANY EXCUSE TO INDULGE MY FEAR OF THE FEMININE, AND CELIA GAVE ME EVERY OPPORTUNITY.
THE COMING OF OUR FIRST BABY GAVE ME HOPE!
BUT EVEN WITH CHILD, CELIA CONTINUED HOOKING FOR DRUG MONEY.
I'D OFTEN THROW STRANGERS OUT OF OUR BEDROOM.
GET OUT!
SHE WASN'T WORTH IT.
I NAMED OUR SON PHRED. HE WAS AMAZING. I LOVED THE LITTLE GUY. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE I WAS HAPPY.
PAT PAT
I SUSPECTED CELIA OF BEATING PHRED, AND SHE ADMITTED IT.
SHE BEGGED ME NOT TO LEAVE HER. SHE SAID SHE'D NEVER TOUCH PHRED AGAIN.
SHORTLY AFTER, I HAD TO LEAVE TOWN FOR A WEEK ON BUSINESS.
CELIA WAS PISSED! BUT I HAD TO GO.
FINDING CELIA HIGH WHEN I RETURNED WAS NO SURPRISE. BUT TO MY HORROR...
...PHRED'S EYES HAD BEEN REMOVED, WITH THE SKIN SEWN OVER THE SOCKETS.
CELIA SAID A DOCTOR IN TOWN HAD NEEDED AN EYE TRANSPLANT, AND SHE'D SOLD HIM PHRED'S EYES FOR A BIG BOX OF MORPHINE.
MY FEARS OF WOMEN AND THE FEMININE WERE WELL PLACED. CELIA TOOK THE ONLY THING I EVER LOVED, AS PHRED DIED SOON AFTERWARDS.
I WANTED TO KILL CELIA, BUT SHE BEAT ME TO IT, O.D.ING A MONTH LATER.
THE SAD TRUTH IS, IF SHE HAD LIVED, I WOULD'VE STAYED WITH HER. I FELT I DESERVED TO BE PUNISHED.
AND THAT'S THE ONE THING ME AND CELIA BOTH AGREED ON.


2ND WIFE
IN MY MID-THIRTIES I MOVED BACK TO THE STATES, AND MARRIED MY SECOND MISTAKE, JUDY.
JUDY WAS EVERYTHING CELIA WASN'T.
AND AFTER PHRED, I WOULD NEVER TRUST WOMEN AGAIN.
EXACTING REVENGE FROM JUDY FOR THE WAY CELIA HAD HUMILIATED ME MUST HAVE BEEN SOMETHING JUDY FELT SHE SOMEHOW DESERVED.
I COULD SEE THE SAME LOOK OF DEPENDENCE IN HER FACE THAT I SHOWED CELIA. SO WE TRADED PLACES. I WAS CELIA, AND JUDY WAS...ME.
JUDY NEVER UNDERSTOOD WHY I'D GET SICK TRYING TO MAKE LOVE. BUT IT ALWAYS HAPPENED.
I'D LIE THERE THINKING ABOUT HOW WORTHLESS WOMEN ARE, BLAMING JUDY FOR MY OWN PROBLEMS.
I'D WONDER WHY JUDY PUT UP WITH ME DEMEANING HER SO.
BUT I ALREADY KNEW THE ANSWER, AFTER LIVING WITH CELIA.
I'D NOTICE JUDY SNEAKING BOOZE INTO THE BATHROOM WHEN SHE THOUGHT I WAS ASLEEP.
WHEN JUDY LAUGHED AT MY BAG, I MADE HER WEAR IT.
THE THRILL OF HUMILIATING SOMEONE ELSE WAS EXCITING, FOR A CHANGE.
PUFF
BUT LATER I FELT GUILTY.
SOB
SNIFF
CELIA WAS ONLY OBLIVIOUS...I WAS BECOMING A CRUEL PERVERT.
WHERE WAS ALL THIS HATE COMING FROM?
PLEASE FORGIVE ME, HONEY.
LATER I'D STEW ABOUT DEMEANING MYSELF IN FRONT OF HER.

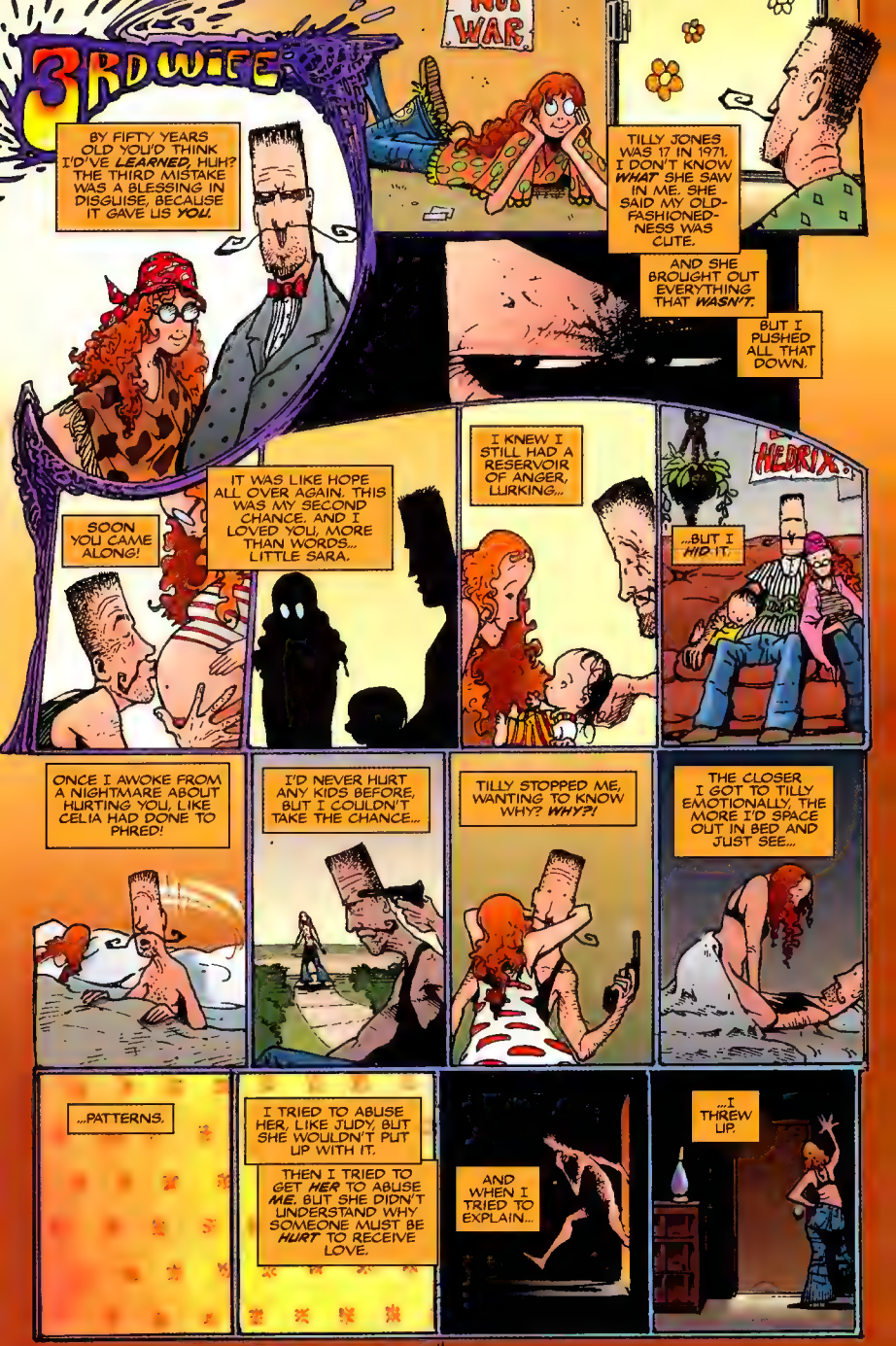

THINGS GOT UGLY. ONCE I CAUGHT JUDY DRINKING, AND SLAPPED HER AROUND.
SHE TOLD HER BROTHER AND HE CAME OVER AND BEAT THE CRAP OUT OF ME! HE ALSO BEAT HER UP FOR TELLING.
POP
CRUNK
THAT NIGHT JUDY HEARD ME TALKING IN MY SLEEP. WHATEVER I WAS SAYING WAS GIVING ME NIGHTMARES...
THE NEXT MORNING SHE TOLD ME...
YOU WERE TALKING IN YOUR SLEEP... YOU SAID--
I MUST'VE BLACKED OUT AT THOSE WORDS, BECAUSE...
...I AWOKE TWO DAYS LATER, IN THAT SAME SPOT!
JUDY HADN'T CALLED A DOCTOR OR ANYTHING!!
SHE JUST LEFT ME THERE LIKE THAT FOR TWO WHOLE DAYS.
AFTER THAT I KNEW I COULD NO LONGER TRUST JUDY. MAYBE IT WAS THE BOTTLE, OR MAYBE SHE WAS JUST SICK OF MY SH*T...
WHATEVER IT WAS, SHE'D FOUND A WEAK SPOT.
SHE'D COME AND STAND OVER ME WHENEVER I GOT SICK, CREEPING ME OUT.
AND SHE'D DRINK IN FRONT OF ME NOW! SHE DIDN'T CARE!
SHE WENT ALONG WITH MY GAMES...
BUT I COULD FEEL HER HATRED...
PUFF
...READY TO...
...BLOW.
ONE DAY SHE WHISPERED THAT SAME PHRASE...
...AND I AWOKE IN TRACTION.
WHEN I GOT HOME, JUDY HAD MOVED OUT FOR GOOD.

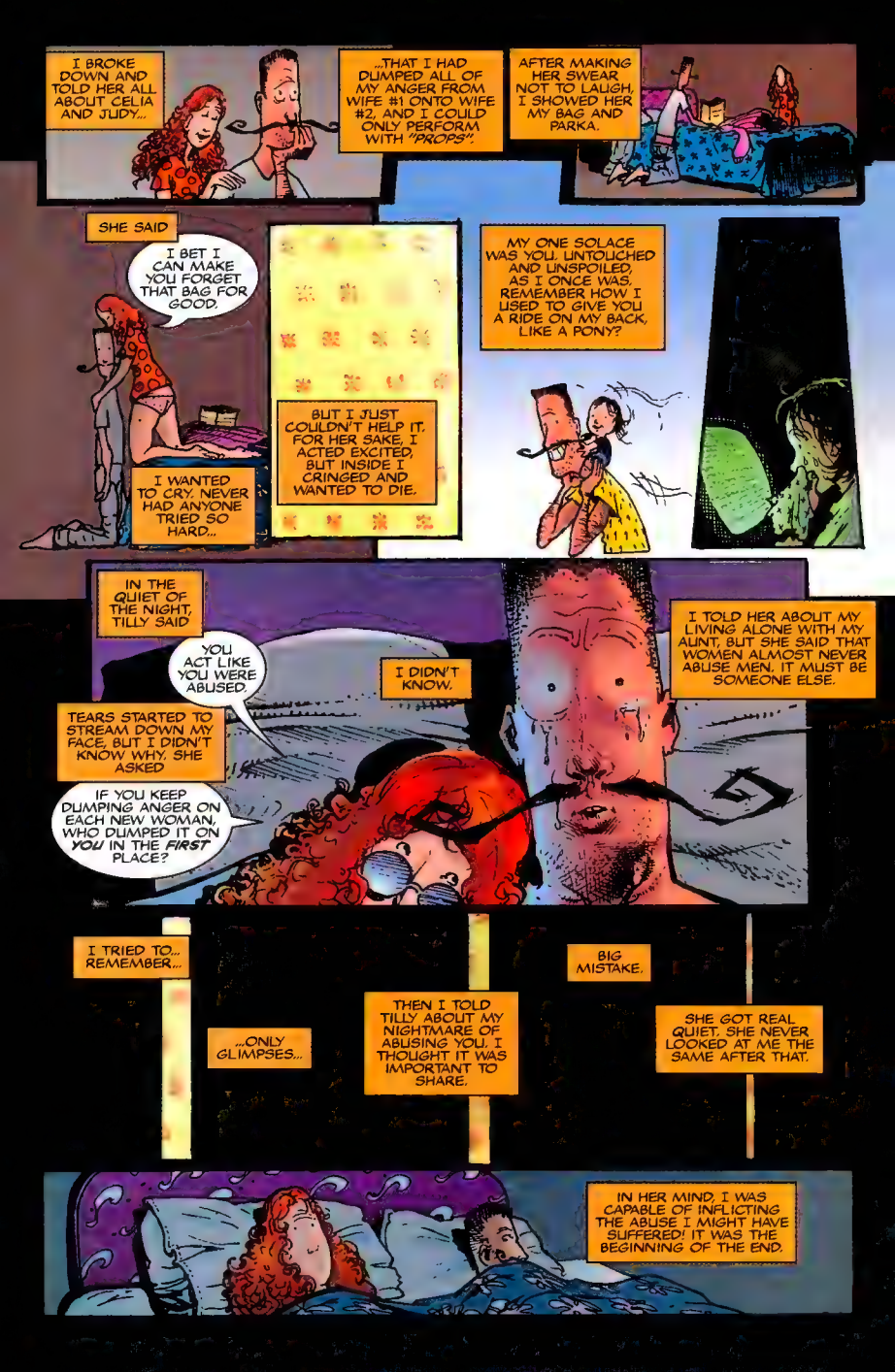

BY MY FORTIES I'D MOVED AWAY TO AUSTRALIA, TRYING TO FORGET WHAT I'D INFLICTED OR HAD BEEN INFLICTED ON ME BY VARIOUS WOMEN IN MY LIFE.
I BEFRIENDED SOME ABORIGINAL NATIVES WHO TOOK ME IN.
I WAS HORRIFIED TO FIND THAT A GROUP OF THE NATIVE CHILDREN THERE WERE VICTIMS OF ORGAN EXPERIMENTS, JUST LIKE PHRED.
I FELT A SPECIAL BOND WITH THESE CHILDREN WHO CLUSTERED AROUND ME, BLINDLY FEELING THEIR WAY.
I LIVED THERE FOR YEARS, LEARNING THEIR TRADITIONS, THOUGH I OFTEN FELT THEY WERE HUMORING ME.
FOR YEARS I TRIED TO MASTER THEIR MAGICAL ART OF "WALKING IN THE DREAMTIME", WITH NO SUCCESS.
UNFORTUNATELY, I HAD NO IDEA WHOSE IT WAS.
THEN, ONE DAY, I DID IT! I'D PENETRATED SOMEONE'S OUTBACK.
LATER I AWOKE ALONE, WITH NO SIGN OF THE TRIBE. UPON RETURNING TO TOWN, I WAS INFORMED THE PEOPLE I LIVED WITH DID NOT EXIST.

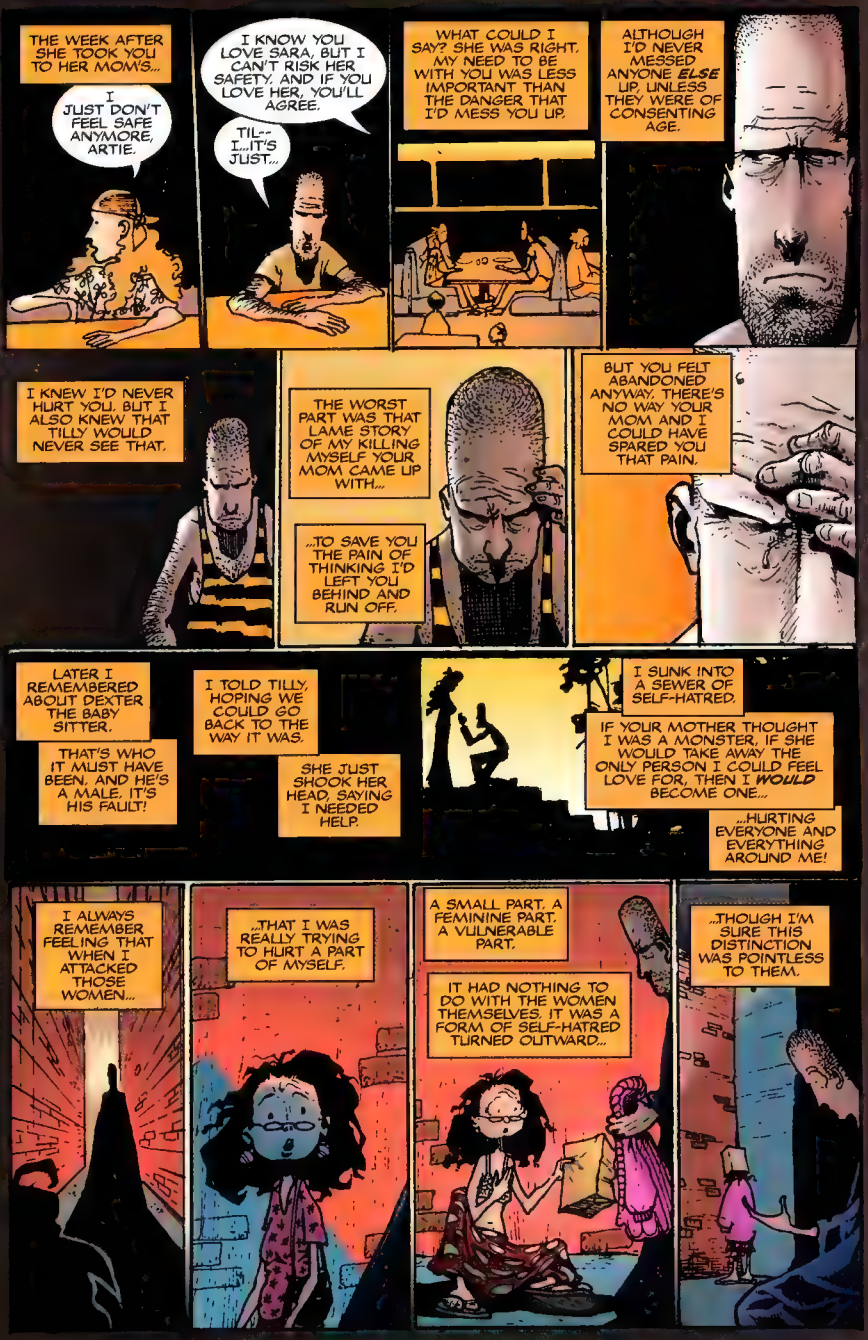

I RETURNED TO THE STATES TO VISIT AN OLD SCHOOL CHUM AND HIS WIFE.
THEY TOOK ME IN, AND I TOLD THEM OF MY TRAVELS, AND ADVENTURES...
...AS I ALSO TOLD THEIR LITTLE DAUGHTER, JULIE.
FOR I HADN'T JUST LEARNED TO WALK IN MINDS IN AUSTRALIA. NO, I HAD ***REALIZED***, IN THAT MOMENT, THE ***ONE REASON*** I'VE BEEN ANGRY AND AFRAID OF WOMEN MY WHOLE LIFE--WHY I'D PUT UP WITH CELIA, AND WHY JUDY HAD PUT UP WITH ME, THE SICKNESS, THE PAPER BAGS, PARKAS, DEXTER, AUNT RUTH, ***EVERYTHING*** ALL CAME DOWN TO THIS ONE THING...
...BUT I FORGOT TO WRITE IT DOWN.
I REMEMBER IT HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH... ***ABUSE***, THOUGH.

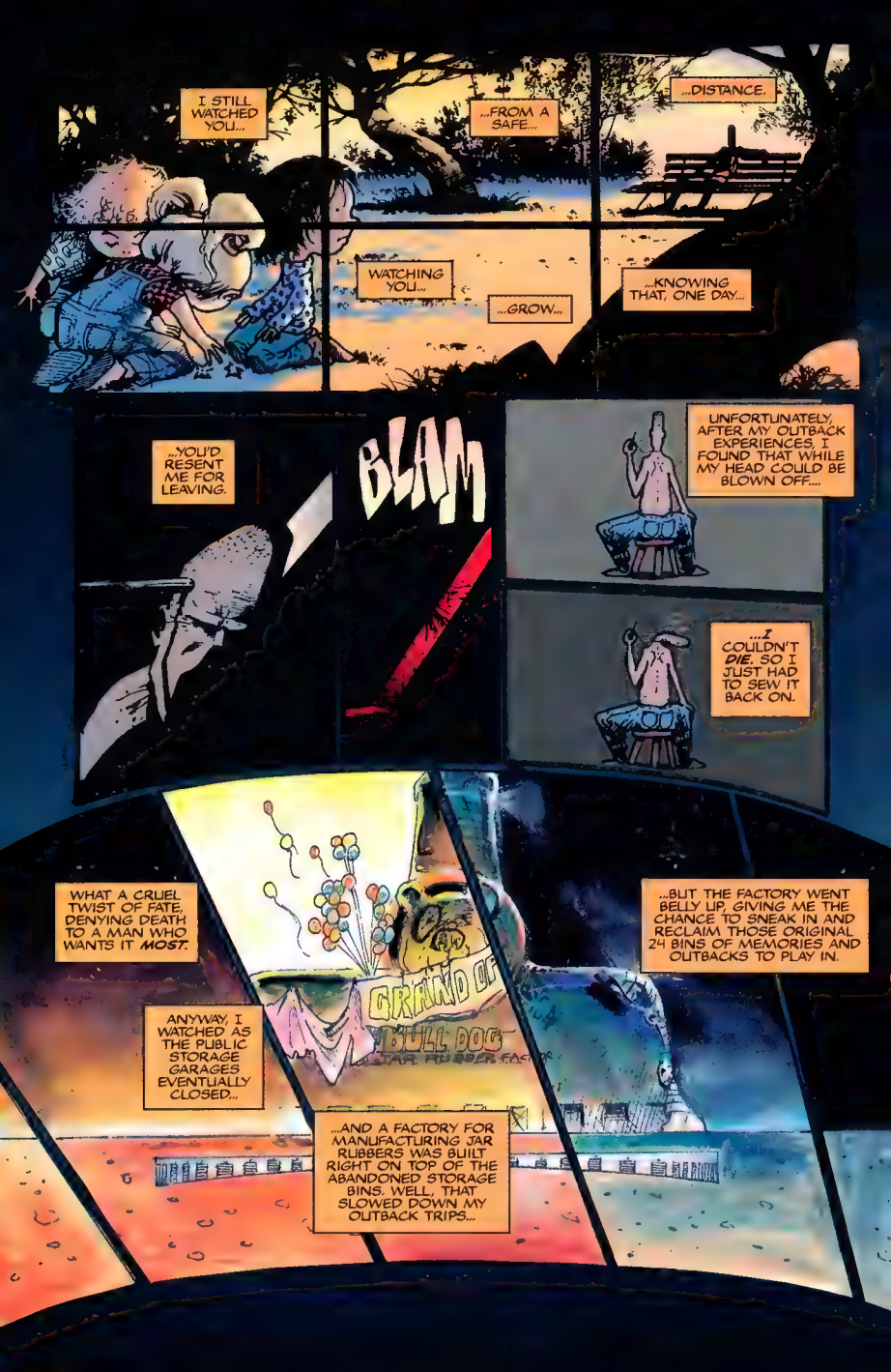

ANYWAY, THE ABORIGINES HAD POWER SPOTS! HERE THEY WERE PUBLIC STORAGE BINS! I FOUND A CIRCULAR GROUP OF 24 BINS TO EXPLORE. STRANGERS! "OUTBACKS".
I EVEN TALKED MY CHUM JOHN WINTERS INTO KEEPING HIS DAUGHTER'S OLD STUFF IN ONE. SHE'D GONE TO COLLEGE AND THEY NEEDED THE ROOM.
NOW, WITH JULIE'S STUFF STORED, I WOULDN'T BE LIMITED TO THE OUTBACKS OF 24 ***STRANGERS***...
...I COULD WATCH SOMEONE I KNEW PERSONALLY, AS HER OUTBACK DEVELOPED.

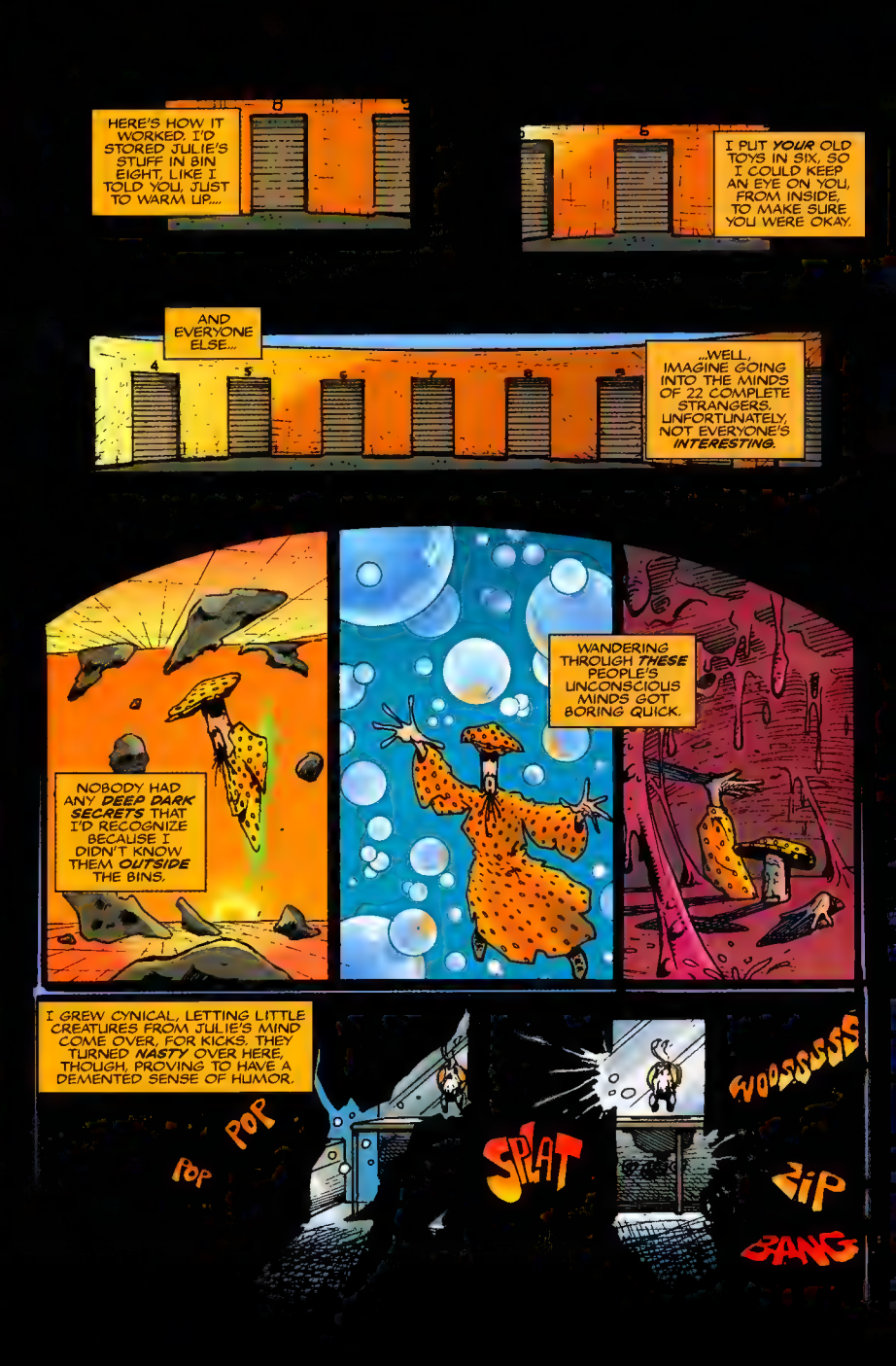
I THOUGHT THIS STUFF WOULD MAKE ME FEEL ***CLOSER*** TO YOU!
INSTEAD I JUST FEEL SICK KNOWING ABOUT ALL THE ABUSE YOU ***SUFFERED THROUGH*** AND ***GAVE OUT!*** IT JUSTIFIES NOTHING...
I MEAN ***JEEZ!*** IS THERE ANYBODY WHO ***ISN'T*** USING THE "I WAS ABUSED AS A CHILD, AND THAT'S WHY I DID IT" DEFENSE? GIMME A BREAK.

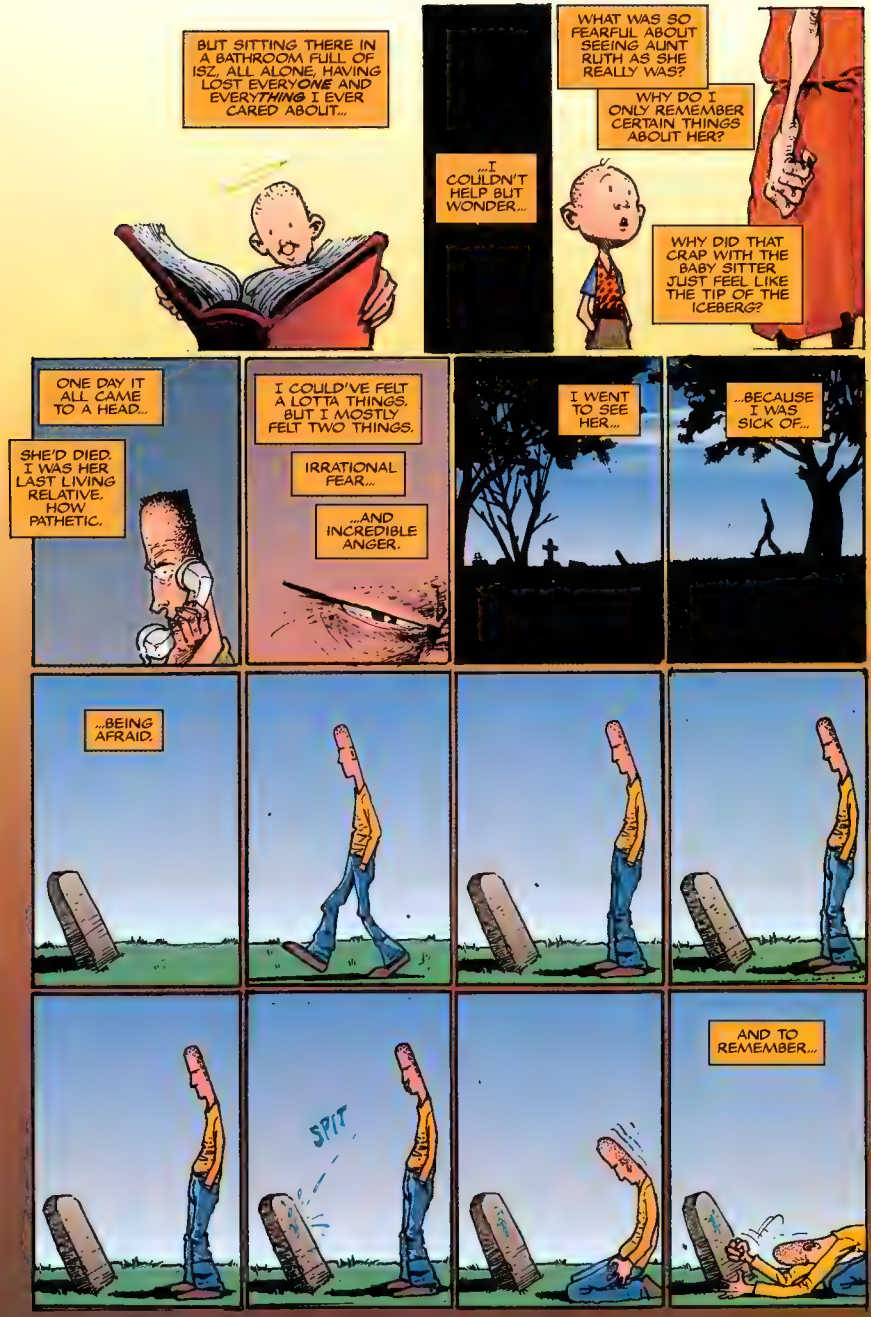

3RD WIFE
BY FIFTY YEARS OLD YOU'D THINK I'D'VE LEARNED, HUH? THE THIRD MISTAKE WAS A BLESSING IN DISGUISE, BECAUSE IT GAVE US YOU.
WAR
TILLY JONES WAS 17 IN 1971. I DON'T KNOW WHAT SHE SAW IN ME. SHE SAID MY OLD-FASHIONED-NESS WAS CUTE.
AND SHE BROUGHT OUT EVERYTHING THAT WASN'T.
BUT I PUSHED ALL THAT DOWN.
SOON YOU CAME ALONG!
IT WAS LIKE HOPE ALL OVER AGAIN. THIS WAS MY SECOND CHANCE. AND I LOVED YOU, MORE THAN WORDS... LITTLE SARA.
I KNEW I STILL HAD A RESERVOIR OF ANGER, LURKING...
HENDRIX
...BUT I HID IT.
ONCE I AWOKE FROM A NIGHTMARE ABOUT HURTING YOU, LIKE CELIA HAD DONE TO PHRED!
I'D NEVER HURT ANY KIDS BEFORE, BUT I COULDN'T TAKE THE CHANCE...
TILLY STOPPED ME, WANTING TO KNOW WHY? WHY?!
THE CLOSER I GOT TO TILLY EMOTIONALLY, THE MORE I'D SPACE OUT IN BED AND JUST SEE...
...PATTERNS.
I TRIED TO ABUSE HER, LIKE JUDY, BUT SHE WOULDN'T PUT UP WITH IT.
THEN I TRIED TO GET HER TO ABUSE ME. BUT SHE DIDN'T UNDERSTAND WHY SOMEONE MUST BE HURT TO RECEIVE LOVE.
AND WHEN I TRIED TO EXPLAIN...
...I THREW UP.

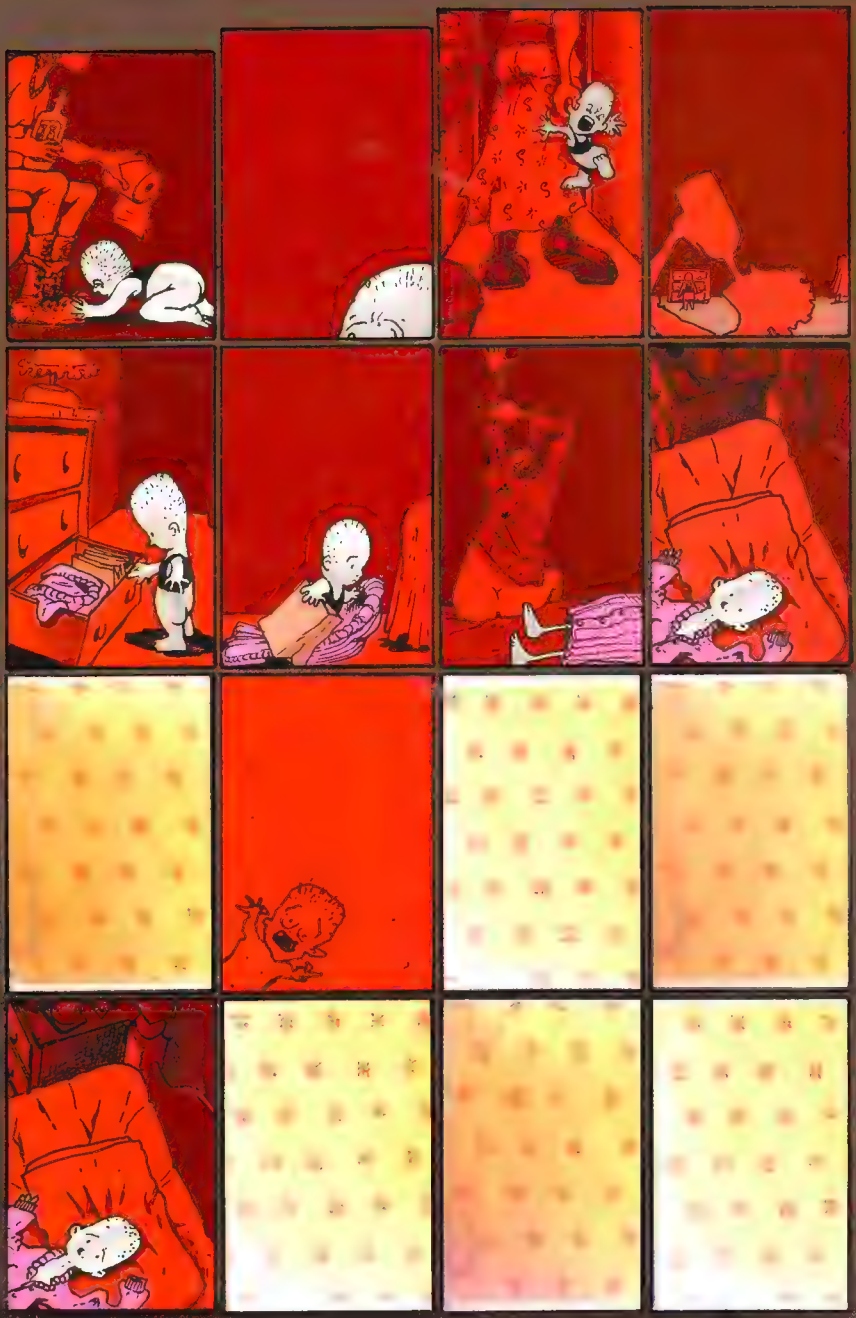

I BROKE DOWN AND TOLD HER ALL ABOUT CELIA AND JUDY...
...THAT I HAD DUMPED ALL OF MY ANGER FROM WIFE #1 ONTO WIFE #2, AND I COULD ONLY PERFORM WITH "PROPS".
AFTER MAKING HER SWEAR NOT TO LAUGH, I SHOWED HER MY BAG AND PARKA.
SHE SAID
I BET I CAN MAKE YOU FORGET THAT BAG FOR GOOD.
I WANTED TO CRY. NEVER HAD ANYONE TRIED SO HARD...
BUT I JUST COULDN'T HELP IT. FOR HER SAKE, I ACTED EXCITED, BUT INSIDE I CRINGED AND WANTED TO DIE.
MY ONE SOLACE WAS YOU. UNTOUCHED AND UNSPOILED, AS I ONCE WAS. REMEMBER HOW I USED TO GIVE YOU A RIDE ON MY BACK, LIKE A PONY?
IN THE QUIET OF THE NIGHT, TILLY SAID
YOU ACT LIKE YOU WERE ABUSED.
I DIDN'T KNOW.
I TOLD HER ABOUT MY LIVING ALONE WITH MY AUNT, BUT SHE SAID THAT WOMEN ALMOST NEVER ABUSE MEN. IT MUST BE SOMEONE ELSE.
TEARS STARTED TO STREAM DOWN MY FACE, BUT I DIDN'T KNOW WHY. SHE ASKED
IF YOU KEEP DUMPING ANGER ON EACH NEW WOMAN, WHO DUMPED IT ON *YOU* IN THE *FIRST* PLACE?
I TRIED TO... REMEMBER...
...ONLY GLIMPSES...
THEN I TOLD TILLY ABOUT MY NIGHTMARE OF ABUSING YOU. I THOUGHT IT WAS IMPORTANT TO SHARE.
BIG MISTAKE.
SHE GOT REAL QUIET. SHE NEVER LOOKED AT ME THE SAME AFTER THAT.
IN HER MIND, I WAS CAPABLE OF INFLICTING THE ABUSE I MIGHT HAVE SUFFERED! IT WAS THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

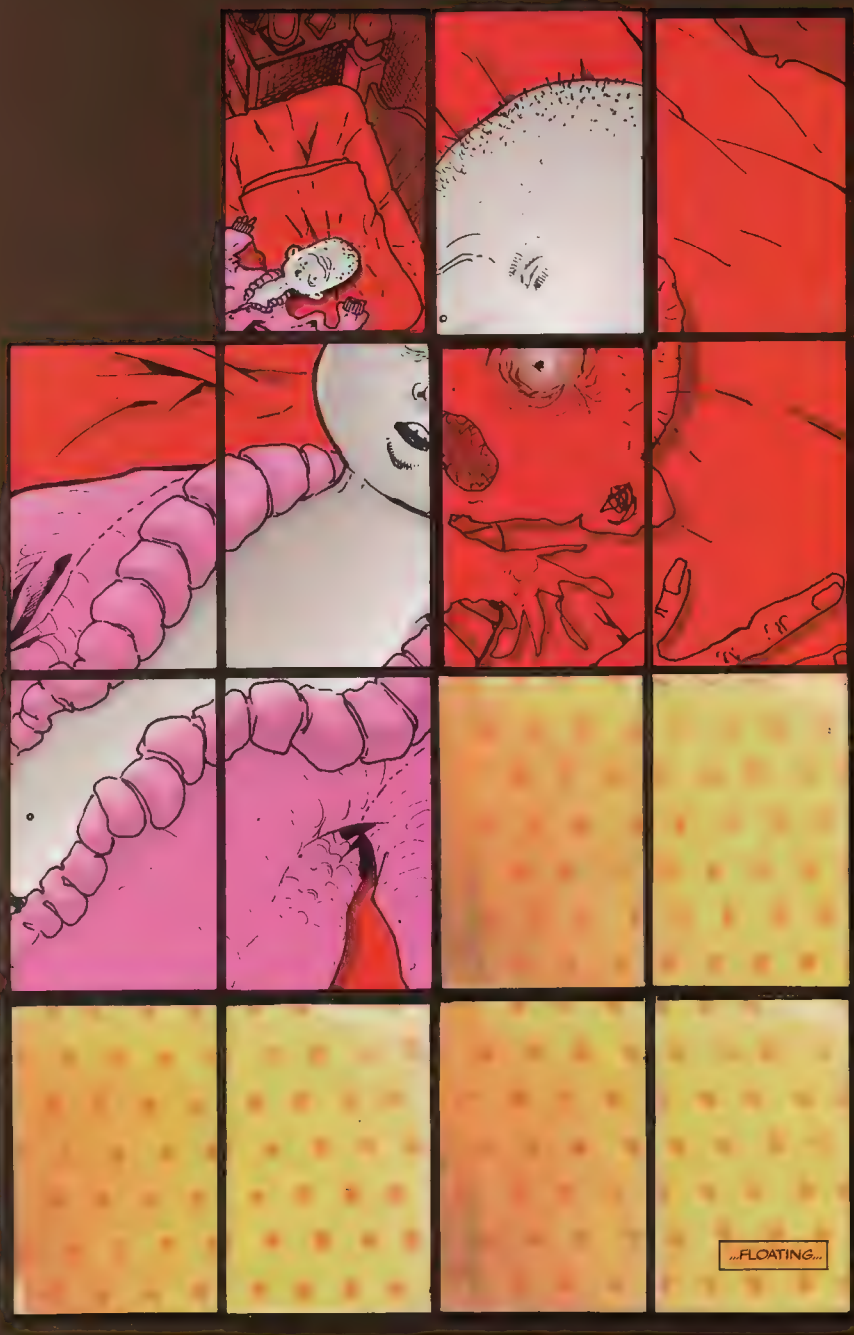

THE WEEK AFTER SHE TOOK YOU TO HER MOM'S...
I JUST DON'T FEEL SAFE ANYMORE, ARTIE.
I KNOW YOU LOVE SARA, BUT I CAN'T RISK HER SAFETY. AND IF YOU LOVE HER, YOU'LL AGREE.
TIL-- I...IT'S JUST...
WHAT COULD I SAY? SHE WAS RIGHT. MY NEED TO BE WITH YOU WAS LESS IMPORTANT THAN THE DANGER THAT I'D MESS YOU UP.
ALTHOUGH I'D NEVER MESSED ANYONE ELSE UP, UNLESS THEY WERE OF CONSENTING AGE.
I KNEW I'D NEVER HURT YOU, BUT I ALSO KNEW THAT TILLY WOULD NEVER SEE THAT.
THE WORST PART WAS THAT LAME STORY OF MY KILLING MYSELF YOUR MOM CAME UP WITH...
...TO SAVE YOU THE PAIN OF THINKING I'D LEFT YOU BEHIND AND RUN OFF.
BUT YOU FELT ABANDONED ANYWAY. THERE'S NO WAY YOUR MOM AND I COULD HAVE SPARED YOU THAT PAIN.
LATER I REMEMBERED ABOUT DEXTER THE BABY SITTER.
THAT'S WHO IT MUST HAVE BEEN. AND HE'S A MALE. IT'S HIS FAULT!
I TOLD TILLY, HOPING WE COULD GO BACK TO THE WAY IT WAS.
SHE JUST SHOOK HER HEAD, SAYING I NEEDED HELP.
I SUNK INTO A SEWER OF SELF-HATRED.
IF YOUR MOTHER THOUGHT I WAS A MONSTER, IF SHE WOULD TAKE AWAY THE ONLY PERSON I COULD FEEL LOVE FOR, THEN I WOULD BECOME ONE...
...HURTING EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING AROUND ME!
I ALWAYS REMEMBER FEELING THAT WHEN I ATTACKED THOSE WOMEN...
...THAT I WAS REALLY TRYING TO HURT A PART OF MYSELF.
A SMALL PART. A FEMININE PART. A VULNERABLE PART.
IT HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THE WOMEN THEMSELVES. IT WAS A FORM OF SELF-HATRED TURNED OUTWARD...
...THOUGH I'M SURE THIS DISTINCTION WAS POINTLESS TO THEM.

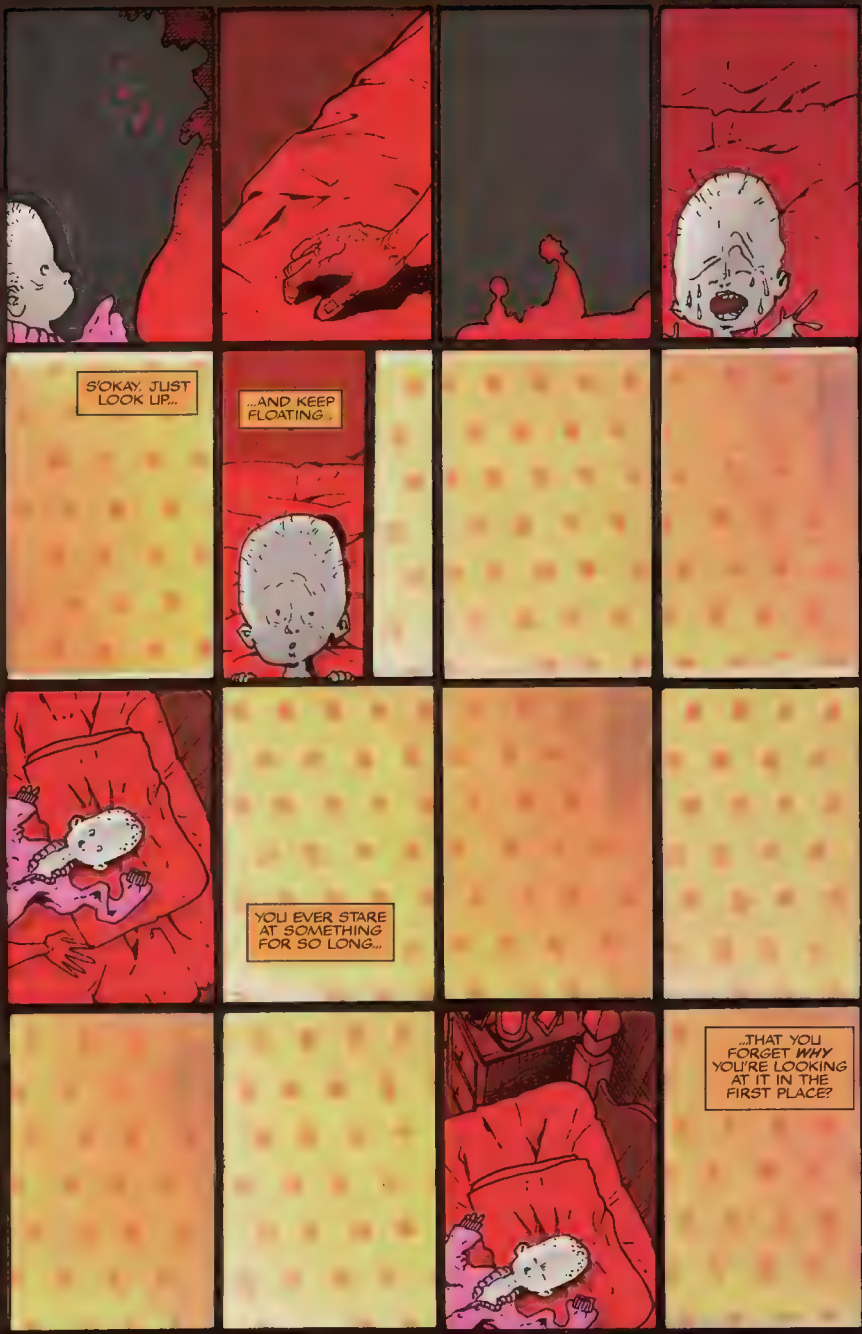

I STILL WATCHED YOU...
...FROM A SAFE...
...DISTANCE.
WATCHING YOU...
...GROW...
...KNOWING THAT, ONE DAY...
...YOU'D RESENT ME FOR LEAVING.
BLAM
UNFORTUNATELY, AFTER MY OUTBACK EXPERIENCES, I FOUND THAT WHILE MY HEAD COULD BE BLOWN OFF...
...I COULDN'T DIE. SO I JUST HAD TO SEW IT BACK ON.
WHAT A CRUEL TWIST OF FATE, DENYING DEATH TO A MAN WHO WANTS IT MOST.
ANYWAY, I WATCHED AS THE PUBLIC STORAGE GARAGES EVENTUALLY CLOSED...
...AND A FACTORY FOR MANUFACTURING JAR RUBBERS WAS BUILT RIGHT ON TOP OF THE ABANDONED STORAGE BINS. WELL, THAT SLOWED DOWN MY OUTBACK TRIPS...
...BUT THE FACTORY WENT BELLY UP, GIVING ME THE CHANCE TO SNEAK IN AND RECLAIM THOSE ORIGINAL 24 BINS OF MEMORIES AND OUTBACKS TO PLAY IN.

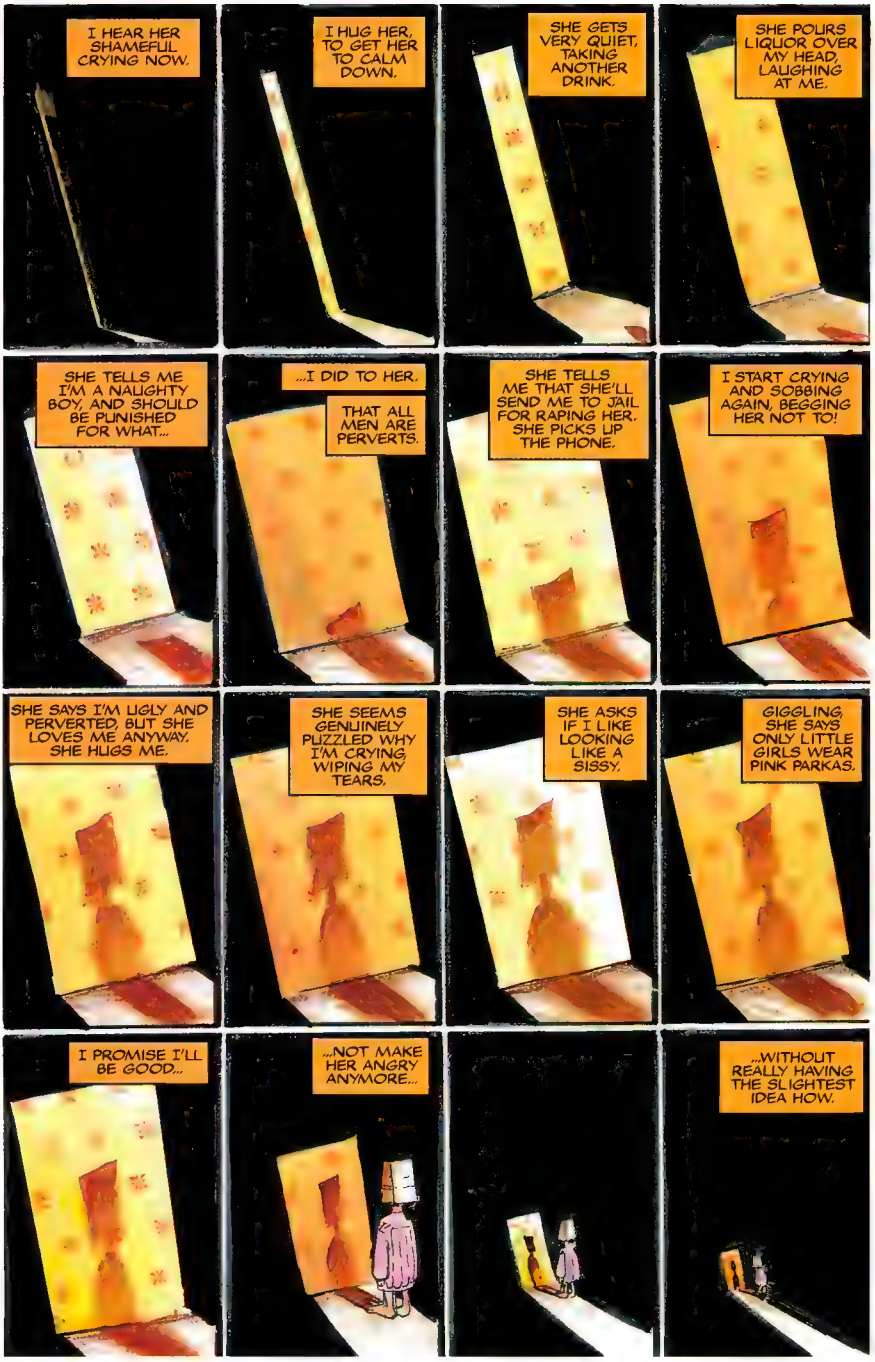

HERE'S HOW IT WORKED. I'D STORED JULIE'S STUFF IN BIN EIGHT, LIKE I TOLD YOU, JUST TO WARM UP....
I PUT YOUR OLD TOYS IN SIX, SO I COULD KEEP AN EYE ON YOU, FROM INSIDE, TO MAKE SURE YOU WERE OKAY.
AND EVERYONE ELSE...
...WELL, IMAGINE GOING INTO THE MINDS OF 22 COMPLETE STRANGERS. UNFORTUNATELY, NOT EVERYONE'S INTERESTING.
NOBODY HAD ANY DEEP DARK SECRETS THAT I'D RECOGNIZE BECAUSE I DIDN'T KNOW THEM OUTSIDE THE BINS.
WANDERING THROUGH THESE PEOPLE'S UNCONSCIOUS MINDS GOT BORING QUICK.
I GREW CYNICAL, LETTING LITTLE CREATURES FROM JULIE'S MIND COME OVER, FOR KICKS. THEY TURNED NASTY OVER HERE, THOUGH, PROVING TO HAVE A DEMENTED SENSE OF HUMOR.
POP
POP
SPLAT
WOOSHHH
ZIP
BANG

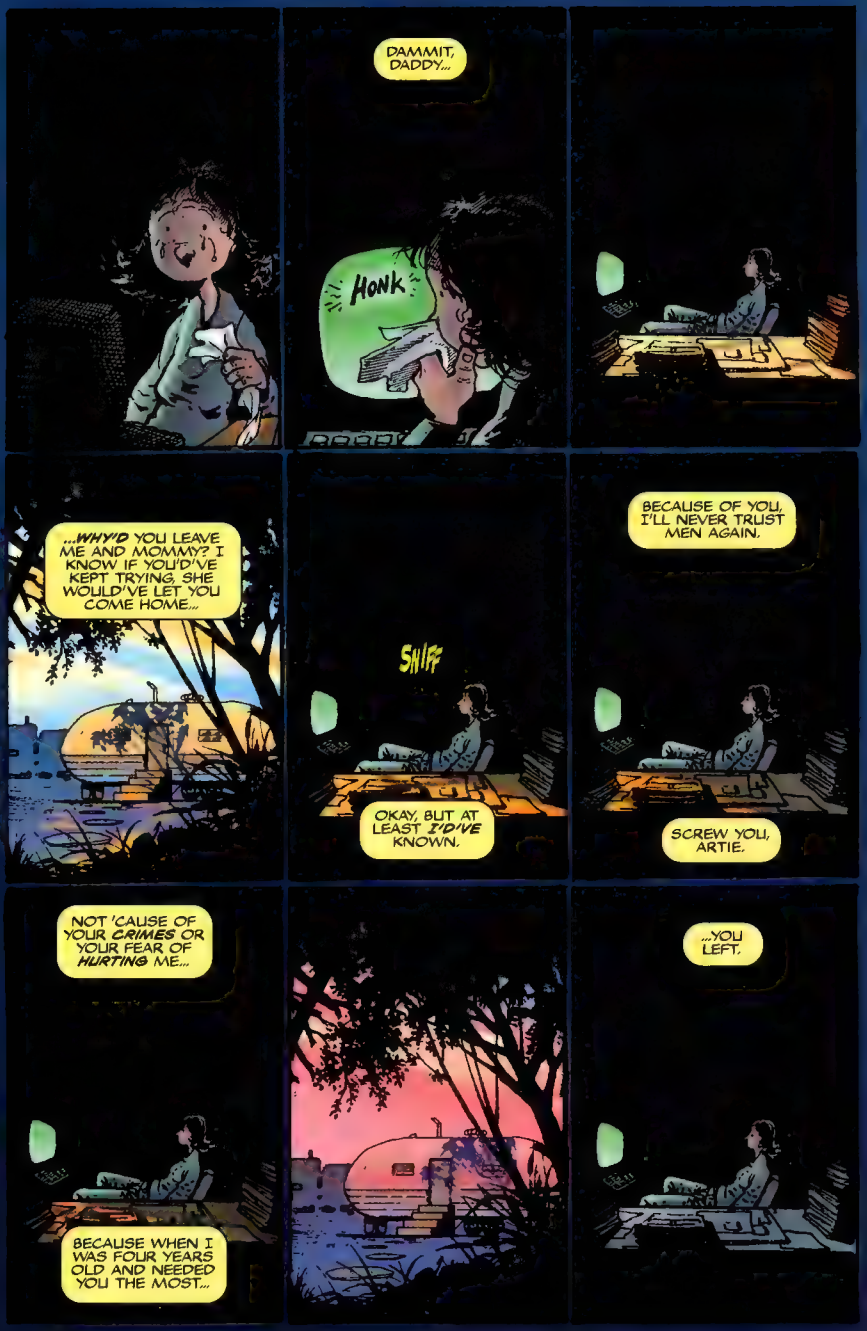

BUT SITTING THERE IN A BATHROOM FULL OF ISZ, ALL ALONE, HAVING LOST EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING I EVER CARED ABOUT...
...I COULDN'T HELP BUT WONDER...
WHAT WAS SO FEARFUL ABOUT SEEING AUNT RUTH AS SHE REALLY WAS?
WHY DO I ONLY REMEMBER CERTAIN THINGS ABOUT HER?
WHY DID THAT CRAP WITH THE BABY SITTER JUST FEEL LIKE THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG?
ONE DAY IT ALL CAME TO A HEAD...
SHE'D DIED. I WAS HER LAST LIVING RELATIVE. HOW PATHETIC.
I COULD'VE FELT A LOTTA THINGS. BUT I MOSTLY FELT TWO THINGS.
IRRATIONAL FEAR...
...AND INCREDIBLE ANGER.
I WENT TO SEE HER...
...BECAUSE I WAS SICK OF...
...BEING AFRAID.
SPIT
AND TO REMEMBER...




...FLOATING...


S'OKAY. JUST LOOK UP...
...AND KEEP FLOATING.
...YOU EVER STARE AT SOMETHING FOR SO LONG...
...THAT YOU FORGET *WHY* YOU'RE LOOKING AT IT IN THE FIRST PLACE?


I HEAR HER SHAMEFUL CRYING NOW.
I HUG HER, TO GET HER TO CALM DOWN.
SHE GETS VERY QUIET, TAKING ANOTHER DRINK.
SHE POURS LIQUOR OVER MY HEAD, LAUGHING AT ME.
SHE TELLS ME I'M A NAUGHTY BOY, AND SHOULD BE PUNISHED FOR WHAT...
...I DID TO HER.
THAT ALL MEN ARE PERVERTS.
SHE TELLS ME THAT SHE'LL SEND ME TO JAIL FOR RAPING HER. SHE PICKS UP THE PHONE.
I START CRYING AND SOBBING AGAIN, BEGGING HER NOT TO!
SHE SAYS I'M UGLY AND PERVERTED, BUT SHE LOVES ME ANYWAY. SHE HUGS ME.
SHE SEEMS GENUINELY PUZZLED WHY I'M CRYING, WIPING MY TEARS.
SHE ASKS IF I LIKE LOOKING LIKE A SISSY.
GIGGLING, SHE SAYS ONLY LITTLE GIRLS WEAR PINK PARKAS.
I PROMISE I'LL BE GOOD...
...NOT MAKE HER ANGRY ANYMORE...
...WITHOUT REALLY HAVING THE SLIGHTEST IDEA HOW.


DAMMIT, DADDY...
HONK
...WHY'D YOU LEAVE ME AND MOMMY? I KNOW IF YOU'D'VE KEPT TRYING, SHE WOULD'VE LET YOU COME HOME...
SNIFF
OKAY, BUT AT LEAST I'D'VE KNOWN.
BECAUSE OF YOU, I'LL NEVER TRUST MEN AGAIN.
SCREW YOU, ARTIE.
NOT 'CAUSE OF YOUR CRIMES OR YOUR FEAR OF HURTING ME...
BECAUSE WHEN I WAS FOUR YEARS OLD AND NEEDED YOU THE MOST...
...YOU LEFT.

MAXX paid a visit to Erik Larsen's Savage Dragon, recently, and Andy Mangles wrote a cool story about Sara in Gay Comics. Check 'em out.

There's been some squawking about a few parts being missing from the Maxx videotape of the MTV episodes. We were operating under the 2-hr tape limit, so I took out the complete Mako-Savage Dragon episode cuz it seemed to have the least relevance to the over-all story (sorry, Erik). If you haven't seen these shows, don't sweat it. There's stuff in the book that's not in the toon, and vise versa.

Head to Head: a huge success, including three marriage proposals so far (to other people, not me). One minor change, though, so listen up. It's not so cool to print your phone number and address in an international rag like this one, so we STRONGLY ADVISE you to use e-mail or post office box numbers. In fact, we advise it SO strongly that, as of next ish, we will NO LONGER PRINT HOME ADDRESSES OR PHONE NUMBERS IN THE "PENPALS" SECTION (sorry). That's right—for your safety and the privacy of other people living with you, PENPALS MUST USE E-MAIL OR POST OFFICE BOX NUMBERS. Other sections, like Creator stuff, Wanted, even Personals (which don't use addresses anyway, usually) can still use home numbers, but NOT PENPALS. I know—it's more trouble and expense, but not everybody out there is as SANELY insane as we (and you) are. So—a minor change. Got it? Cool.

WENDY KILGORE
Montgomery, AL

Dear Sam and Company,

I used to think that your letter had to be fake, as I had never had anything similar happen to me. But I just have to tell you about the "surprise" that my wife had arranged for me for my 26th birthday...

WHOOPS! WRONG MAGAZINE!!

Let's start this over again.....

Adrian Grace
Victoria, Australia

Sam,

I think the new story line with Sara is perfect! I can't wait to get ahold of #25. I'm glad that Julie's son was in the beginning of #24. I hope Julie comes back. (She kinda has to 'cause there is a yellow slug after her.)

Sara is such a great character! When I first found out about The Maxx (about 1 year ago), I could relate to her a lot. Some of her problems were similar to mine. She seems around my age, so I love her. In the newer comics she is 25 or so, but I still love her.

I recently read Friends of the Maxx and that was the best! It was so long and the whole story was so intruguing. Dude and Mickey are so great. They are lucky they have each other to love. Even though they fight a lot and keep secrets from each other, they need each other. I'm glad you created this, too.

See ya!
Jennifer Podagrosi
Phoenix, AZ

RALPH McBRIDE
Southland, New Zealand

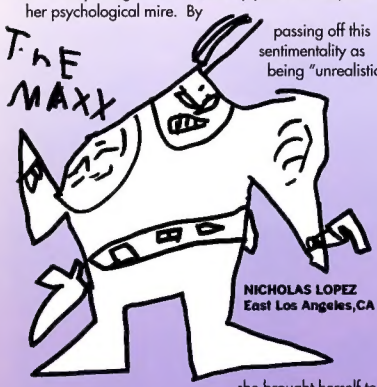
Dear Sam,

In the nexus of this tangled tale is The Maxx, the patron spirit of every person's personal spirit animal. His task is to bring people to a state of inner peace and harmony through journeys of self-realization in both the waking world and the subconscious land of Pangaea. The path is often long and difficult; subconscious symbols must be deciphered, personal behavior must be dramatically altered, and repressed past traumas must be dredged up and dealt with.

It should be noted, however, that Maxx is not the only universal symbol in this comic. The Isz, which occupy only Julie's Outback, are but two breeds of "grey-matter monstrosities." Isz of all shapes and sizes deal with one thing: the negative aspects of their hosts' thoughts. Think about it: Pitt saw a multitude of weeping Timmys, Julie saw ravaging predators (the psyche of a rapist), and Sara sees cutesy fairies (yuck). The fairies represent her disdain for sappiness

and traditional dependence upon parental figures, which is what she consciously scorns but (as ish #23 illustrates) deep down truly needs. The fairies also imply the "daddy's little darling" concept that she tried to shake but ended up temporarily accepting during issues #15-20. Now, as she reacquaints herself with her father, these fairies are one step closer to disappearing forever.

Precluding this disappearance is Iago, the actual symbol for Sara's obstacles on the path of healing. His task is to stunt her spiritual growth by taking those with above-average negativity in their lives to his fairy-Isz breeding ground. Figuratively speaking, each person of this type feeds Sara's fairies (reaffirms her cynicism). The sappy optimism in her life is represented by Iago people who try to reach her by using words which only push her deeper into her psychological mire. By passing off this sentimentality as being "unrealistic," she brought herself to her current malaise-ridden, surruptitious existence.



NICHOLAS LOPEZ
East Los Angeles,CA

An interesting feature of the comic arises when Sara and Julie are contrasted. They're almost complete opposites, yet distinctly similar. This state stems from their respective childhoods. Julie's dominant and controlling mother gave her a sense of security, but feelings of being the "lowest in station." Sara, on the other hand, chose a big spirit animal because of a lack of parental influence. The linking factor between Sara and Julie is that both of their "Maxxes" represent the dangers of repressing "big stuff" like childhood traumas. The lesson here is to deal with things as they come to you, otherwise some big homeless guy will be assimilated into your brain and he'll talk weird and break things and stuff!

Charlie Barr
Fanwood, NJ

Interesting. But what does everybody else think?

Sam,

Just got around to reading Maxx Traxx #23, so I decided to let everyone know Norbert can most definitely procreate. I mean, he is hung like a…

Sat Kirpal
Guaynabo, Puerto Rico

Dearest Sam,

Am I curious as to a male Outback? Hell, yes! I'm out back all the time, and for once I'd like others to see how hard all that mowing is. So show us some man!

Matt Cashel
Neosho, MO

Dear Mr. Kieth,

Could Mark's (Julie's son's) Maxx be female? After all, spirit animals are animals, and they can be of either sex, can't they?

Mike Betite
Verona, NJ

Dear Sam Kieth,

First of all, a big razzberry to those meat-breath ant teeklers that think MTV Maxxheads aren't true Maxxheads.

I rilly like the new series. I always thought Sara deserved some more attention. She was my favorite character since #4. I'm hoping to see more of her horse Maxx & possibly what her Outback looks like after all these years. A moment of silence for Pumkin, Yakkity Takkity, Poochie, & Dial-A-Doodle. We hardly knew them. Oh, also, Mr. Kieth, have Sara take it easy on poor ol' Artie. He doesn't seem like the Mr. Gone of ten years past. He seems like a nice enough guy.

Mutt
Bedford, TX

P.S. I think Mark Winters' spirit animal should be a female fox.

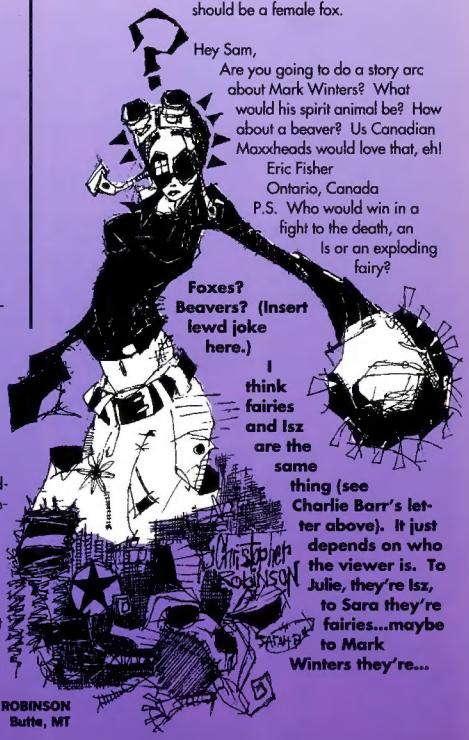
TUNG NGUYEN
Clayton, Australia

Hey Sam,

Are you going to do a story arc about Mark Winters? What would his spirit animal be? How about a beaver? Us Canadian Maxxheads would love that, eh!

Eric Fisher
Ontario, Canada

P.S. Who would win in a fight to the death, an Isz or an exploding fairy?



CHRISTOPHER ROBINSON
Butte, MT

Dear Mr. Kieth,
What about Gone's Outback—a Wasteland devoid of Beauty, or Plentiful with obscenties. What's in his head!! Who's his Mr. Gone, who's trying to corrupt him? Who's his Maxx, trying to save him? Is his Maxx Sara, or Julie?
What if all his fights were in his head? That's why he left, to get away from it all, to wage the battle in his mind. His Maxx could be a Gone body with a Maxx mask. His Gone could be a Maxx body with a Gone mask...
Mike Furs

Hey, guy, don't wig out on me here...(For more on Gone, read this issue.)

Dear Mr. Kieth,
I thoughT issue #24 was extremely awesome! Sara trashing the pier was very cool (you don't see that kind of thing every day)! I think your decision to warp ten years into the future is also a nice twist to the story line. Besides, we get to see what Sara is up to and it's a chance to introduce new characters. Those who disagree...IT"S NOT YOUR COMIC BOOK!!!!
Thanks for listening,
Allan Glover
Arlington, TX

Actually, I'm not really sure whose comic book it is... It just kinda keeps growing on its own, like the mould in my bathroom.

CHRISTOPHER OLVIS
Beavercreek, OH

NOTICE—You did not send enough money for the Spock Ears. You owe $1.00. Also your Capt. Kirk outfit will arrive shortly.

Who says we don't print every letter we get?

KIETH CHILTON
Burke, VA

Dear Sam Kieth,
I'm only 8 but I think your comic is cool! But I have a question! Why on Darker Image #1 does Julie hurt The Maxx, but on the cover she loves him. I mean I know why she wants to hurt him (she thinks he's a Youngblood). But...Well anyway I love The Maxx comic book. I still can't decide if Spawn or The Maxx is my best Image comic guy. Honestly what do you think? Just because you made The Maxx doesn't mean you have to say him. Be honest!
Your fan,
Graham Bounds
Baton Rouge, LA

P.S. My favorite guy in The Maxx comic book besides him is Julie.

I dunno—when I was your age I would've said Spawn, I guess. And Julie's my other favorite guy, too.

Hey Sam!
Did you honestly think that no one would notice what you did?! You don't know, you say!? Here, let me help you out. In Maxx #24, p. 20 (the page with Iago's list)—that's what. The second-to-last name crossed out is Tony Iommi's. Don't pretend you don't know who that is. (For those who don't know, he's the only original Black Sabbath member who's still with the band.)
It would take a lot more than a giant banana slug to off Tony Iommi, and you know it. Ever pull a stunt like that again, and I'll get Ozzy Osbourne to kick your butt.
A p***ed-off metal fan,
Ben Enos
Boston, MA

Mike Heisler keeps putting real people's names on Iago's list. I told him not to, because it distracts from the story. But he just laughs. Mike has a cruel side.

Dear Sam,
In a film class, I just watched A Clockwork Orange for the first time since reading The Maxx and watching the toon. I realized that the movie at one point featured the song, "I Wanna Marry a Lighthouse Keeper." I was wondering if we (the readers) are supposed to read any intertextual connections into your repeated use of the song in the first half of the plot. Is it coincidence? Is Stanley Kubrick/Clockwork Orange an influence? Visually, I find both your book and Kubrick's films similarly stimulating. Or are we supposed to read into the lyrics of the song kind of an accidental intertext?
Admiringly,
Jeff Nordstedt
New Brunswick, NJ

Intertext? Intertext? Now I feel stoopid. I just like the song.

Dear Sam,
I got a list of questions to ask you.
1. Which Is is rarer on the Maxx figure—you keep changing your mind.
2. When is the next Friends of the Maxx coming out?
3. I got the Maxx figure with the black Is and it is cool; are there any other figures coming out.
4. Is there an actual Maxx movie coming out?

Sean S
Dayton, OH

1. **That's cuz I keep forgetting...somebody tell me. Which one is rarer?**
2. **November.**
3. **No, not yet.**
4. **Working on it.**

Sam Kieth,

I just wanted to say that Maxx is rad. One note: I sure hope you weren't ripping Art Suydam off. There's some very strong resemblances between Sara's hat and Cholly's hat from "Cholly and Flytrap" by Suydam.

Tony I.
Worcester, MA

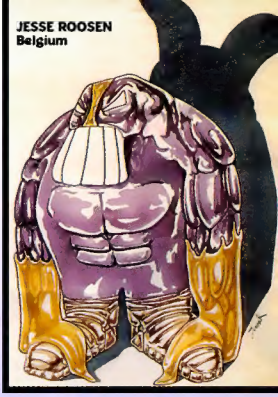
You're right—the checkered pattern on Sara's hat is definitely Suydam. Good eye. Actually I ripped off Suydam, and Suydam ripped off Frazetta, and Frazetta ripped off...uh...no, I think Frazetta made it all up to begin with. Sigh.

Maxx is one of those few comics where the dead stay dead.

I don't know where you're going to go with this, I really don't (that's another unusual thing for the comics I read), but I'm sticking around.

Jay McIntyre
Doylestown, PA

I'm glad I was able to develop a character that you care enough to miss. But there's dead, and then there's...dead...



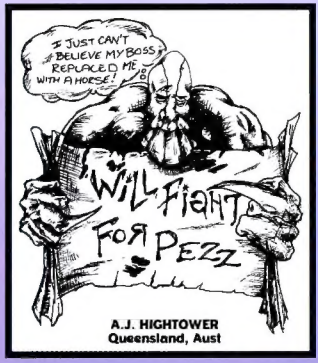
JESSE ROOSEN
Belgium

Dear Sam, the Maxximum plot man,

I've been buying comics for seven years now, and I've experienced plots that were good, bad, or indifferent. But after the first few months of reading (that's reading, not collecting), most stories didn't get to me anymore. After the initial wonder wore off, the stories, no matter how good they were, never affected me emotionally. Only twice in the entire time since I've been reading comics has an issue gotten to me. The Maxx #25 is that second time.

Julie Winters is dead.

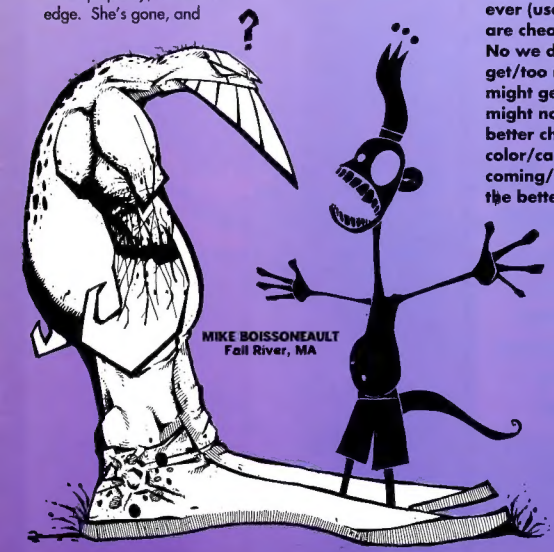
Not in danger of being dead, not in jeopardy, not on the edge. She's gone, and



A.J. HIGHTOWER
Queensland, Aust

OK, NOW, ONE MORE TIME: NO MORE HOME ADDRESSES/ PHONE NUMBERS FOR PENPALS. Use e-mail or p.o. boxes. (This applies to everyone who sent in a Penpal ad after July 20. If yours doesn't appear this month, and you sent it in around July 20 or after, please re-submit it, along with an e-mail or p.o. box number.)

PS/HOUSEKEEPING DETAILS WE GET ASKED ALL THE TIME: No subscriptions or retail sales available/sorry. Use "Head to Head" to find back issues/fan clubs/whatever (use the address in the indicia)/postcards are cheap and easy like us/WRITE LEGIBLY. No we don't print all the letters or art we get/too many/yes we do read them ALL/you might get answered or printed or edited/you might not/life's funny that way. B&w art has better chance of being published than color/can't return artwork/sorry. Keep 'em coming/the better the letters and submissions, the better the book! Oh yeah.



MIKE BOISSONEAULT
Fall River, MA

JOHAN DE ZWART
Holland

JOE BERGIN III
Las Vegas, NV